

QQQ Kalyn Josephson

[00:00:00] **Kalyn:** I definitely still struggle with accepting that. Like, I can't explain every choice that I made and every reader's not gonna know why I did X instead of y.

[00:00:14] **Sarah:** Welcome to Queries, Qualms and Quirks, the weekly podcast that asks published authors to share their successful query letter and discuss their journey from first spark to day of publication. I am your host, author Sarah Nicolas, and literary agent Sarah N Fisk. Kalyn Josephson is a fantasy author living in the California Bay area. She loves books, cats, books with cats, and making up other worlds to live in for a while. The Storm Crow duology is out now.

So please welcome Kalyn to the show. Hello.

[00:00:43] **Kalyn:** Hello, how are you?

[00:00:44] **Sarah:** Hi. Good. We're gonna talk about your journey to publication today, and we're gonna start all the way back at the beginning. when did you start getting interested in writing and how long did it take before you started getting serious about pursuing publication?

[00:00:58] **Kalyn:** You know, this question comes up a lot, especially at like, you know, book launch events and stuff, and I feel like my answer is kind of boring because I'm like, I don't have a specific to give anyone when they ask this. I don't remember one day being like, ah, I have to start writing. You know, like as far back in my memory as I can.

I can recall, I've been doing it to the point that, my mom always likes to joke that she still has some. Writing that I did when I was a kid, namely a Scooby-Doo fan fiction that I supposedly wrote and illustrated when I was seven, and she's yet to be able to produce it. I'm not sure I want her to, like,

[00:01:34] **Sarah:** I need to see it.

[00:01:36] **Kalyn:** I know like part of me wants to, and part of me is like, if you find that it's never going away.

So I haven't asked her to look for it, but I remember doing it. You know, it's always just been making up stories has been one of my favorite pastimes.

Whether it was just, Hanging out in my room and playing with my stuffed animals, or actually writing short stories. it wasn't until, my senior year of college, which would've been 2015, it wasn't until I read Daughter of Smoke and Bone by Lannie Taylor that I was like, oh, I wanna do that. Like I, I was just so sucked away by her world and her magic and her characters that I wanted to be able to create the same feeling in readers.

And I was like, all right, I'm actually, I'm gonna do this for real and see what happens.

[00:02:21] **Sarah:** Awesome. So how did you learn more about the industry, like how it works, how to query, how to go about everything?

[00:02:27] **Kalyn:** I definitely bumbled my way through this. I was extremely unprepared. I started out. Doing the basic Google searches, you know, like how do you get a book published, learning about literary agents and what that means. I did a few Writers Digest classes. They had, um, some query critique classes and they have some just like general writing classes and stuff.

And I, I leaned pretty heavily on those initially. And then I found Twitter, which is kind of sad to say now cause I think so much of that kind of, Culture is, is gone from that website. But at the time it was highly informative. It was full of contests and, other writers looking for critique partners.

Um, and I, I honestly just learned so much from other people who were going through the same thing. I really didn't know half as much as I should have at any stage of the journey when I was querying. I didn't know enough about querying when I was on sub, I didn't know enough about sub. and looking back, like I, I was highly unprepared for what I was doing.

[00:03:27] **Sarah:** Yeah, I feel like that's pretty standard.

[00:03:31] **Kalyn:** Right.

When you, when you Google, like how to find an agent stuff, especially now, I think there are a lot more blogs and there's more, more out there. but at the time, everyone had the same steps everywhere. I would look it, it was the same basic steps about how to, how to query and how to find an agent, which glazed over about 90% of the process that you, you don't hear about until you're doing it.

[00:03:51] **Sarah:** So then what happened? Can you break down your journey from then to signing your first book contract?

[00:03:58] **Kalyn:** Yeah, I had to do some digging in my email to get some stats for you because my memory is the worst, and also it's weirdly been like six years, which was a terrifying thing to discover. but I started querying. My first query I sent was on April 29th, 2015. So again, that was my senior year of college, right when I had read that book.

And, I sent 12 queries for a book that shall never see the light of day. It was definitely too early. It was very much a like half fan fiction that I'd put together and decided like, Hey, yeah, I'll, I'll send this out to professional publishing people. was not a fantastic idea and. Literally two months later, I started sending queries for a second book.

[00:04:43] **Sarah:** Oh.

[00:04:43] **Kalyn:** Yeah. So remember when I said I had absolutely no idea what I was doing? This is, this is the first example. I sent, oh gosh, like 30 queries for that second book. Ultimately actually got an offer from a small press on it, but decided like I, I didn't feel like the book was ready and, and I realized, I was starting to realize I didn't know what I was doing, you know?

so I was like, all right, maybe I need to take a step back and actually like figure out this process a little bit more. but at the time I was fielding responses for queries for both of them. I was also entering pitch contests, which there were a lot more of at the time. Both, Looking for agents in both, mentorship type programs, a couple of smaller ones that don't exist anymore.

and went through more of those Writer's Digest class. So I was kind of like every iron I could put in a fire, I, I was shoveling it in there and, shockingly it, it didn't go very well. Uh, neither of those books, I don't think either of them got any full requests. One of them might have gotten like maybe one, But nothing, nothing viable.

I mean, look, I'm looking at the numbers right now and this is terrible. Six months later that I sent out the third book. That was like December 20th.

[00:05:51] **Sarah:** You're prolific. Okay.

[00:05:52] **Kalyn:** Well, so like one of them had, the very first book had existed for a long time before I decided to try this publishing thing. So that was already there. And the second one was the one that I was like, all right. now that I'm gonna do this, like I'll write a book for it. And then the third one was the first

time I think that I wrote anything remotely like good, that was actually okay to send to agents.

I'll be, probably not when I had two other books already out in the query trenches. but I, Hey, that's, that's what I did. and that one actually got, A fair number of requests. Nothing that, uh, panned out. Nothing that actually worked out. but enough that I was like, oh, okay, maybe, maybe I actually know what I'm doing now.

And I definitely had more of the process in terms of like researching agents and writing queries and all of that down by that point. the writing, the writing was getting there slowly but surely. so those, those three books were all ones that didn't make it past querying, and it wasn't until the fourth one.

Which later became my debut that I actually did sign with an agent. Uh, and that one at least was, I can say a decent book. that was in, let's see, that was in November of 2016. So about a year and a half, a little bit more of querying, of which like I said, should, should probably, shouldn't have really been out there.

The third one maybe. and now compared to today's world, probably a year and a half is not considered that long.

[00:07:18] **Sarah:** Mm-hmm.

[00:07:18] **Kalyn:** Um, I think right now query times are looking much longer with just how overwhelmed everyone is. but at the time it felt like forever. Ultimately what ended up happening is I got a r and r a request and resubmit or revise and resubmit. as I was working on that r and r for the agent who had requested it on this fourth book, I got an offer from another agent on the original version.

[00:07:42] **Sarah:** Hmm.

[00:07:43] **Kalyn:** So then I, I, I pretty much already finished the r and r, so I went ahead and did the last few edits and sent it to that agent and sent, and also by the way, I have an offer of rep, they got back to me not much later having read the revised version and also offered rep.

Uh, so it was a little bit of a weird situation where I wasn't just choosing between two agents, but I was. Choosing between two versions of the book, which is ultimately what, what helped me make my decision because I thought

both of them were awesome and I couldn't go wrong either way. But I liked the revised version of the book so much better

[00:08:15] **Sarah:** Okay.

[00:08:15] **Kalyn:** and had had that revision experience with that agent and, and found it great. That's ultimately what led me to go with my current agent, Carrie Berido. Which I did agonize over that for God. I think I, I think I had like two weeks to think about it and I just bounced back and forth for two weeks.

[00:08:31] **Sarah:** Yeah.

[00:08:31] **Kalyn:** But yeah, that, that is how I went, uh, from querying to ending up with an agent.

I think stats wise, for the fourth book, I sent 55 queries. I got nine full requests, five partial requests, and the r and r, So, yeah, I guess the, the, that would be the stats that in, uh, four books across, a little over a year and a half,

[00:08:52] **Sarah:** Yeah, that's a lot of books.

[00:08:53] **Kalyn:** too many books.

[00:08:55] **Sarah:** Did you revise with your agent before going out on submission again?

[00:08:58] **Kalyn:** Yes, we did. Um, we did two more rounds of revision, and then like a light line edit before we went on submission. And that was, let's see, so we signed in March and we went on sub in August, I believe it was. So it was a, it was a quick revision process. Um, at the time she was also a newer agent, so it was like one of very few clients.

and so also she had a, a lot more time to focus, you know, on edits and whatnot. And so even though we did two full rounds in a short time, like they were pretty in intensive rounds.

[00:09:27] **Sarah:** Mm-hmm. And then you went on submission and how long did it take before it sold?

[00:09:31] **Kalyn:** Um, we went on seven August and got an offer from Source Books who ultimately published it in. Late November, so about four months.

but as I said before, being ultimately unprepared at every stage, I had no idea what submission was when I went on sub. So like I didn't know exactly what was happening. I didn't know whether four months was good or bad, or like how likely you are to get an offer.

Once you're on submission, how likely you're not? So like looking back, like I'm like, oh wow, that was awesome. But at the time I really didn't know anything about it.

[00:10:05] **Sarah:** Yeah. Okay, it's time for the first Q of the podcast. Can you read your query letter for us?

[00:10:10] **Kalyn:** One note is that originally the book was called The Crow Queen, so, and also the main character's name was not Thea it was Anna, which we had to change because of frozen. Dear Agent, the Crow Queen is a YA fantasy novel, complete at 87,000 words that will appeal to fans of the magic and strong female friendships in Susan Dennard's Truth Witch. 17 year old Princess Anna Cerralté's dreams of becoming a crow rider were shattered when the Illucian empire attacked her kingdom.

Destroying the writer's massive crows in killing Anna's mother. A year later, Anna's depression from loss of her mother and the future she trained for her entire life consumes her. When Alisha gathers their strength for a final assault on Anna's now vulnerable kingdom, her sister agrees to engage Anna to the cruel Illucian princes in exchange for peace.

Believing Illucia plans to forcibly place Anna on the in the prince on her kingdom's throne. Once the marriage is official, Anna searches desperately for an alternative. When she finds a crow egg in the ruins of the royal rookery, she scrambles to hatch it, knowing the powerful elemental magic of even one crow could level the playing field between the kingdoms, but the secret of hatching may have died with the crows.

As Anna hunts down the last known crow rider in hopes of learning the egg secrets, she discovers the prince is having her followed and may already know about the egg. To stop her engagement. Anna must let go of her past and depression and hatch the egg before the kingdom falls, and she loses everything to Illucia again.

it's funny reading that now because of how much has changed, like that entire last paragraph is no longer accurate even.

[00:11:33] **Sarah:** Oh, all right. How has your experience been since signing that first book contract? Especially let us know what about the publishing process kind of surprised you along the way?

[00:11:45] **Kalyn:** You mean besides all of it? Cause I didn't know what I was saying. I actually think that if agents had like a, a publishing one-o-one, just like a little quick cheat sheet doc to send new clients, like, Hey, just in case, you know, you're like, Kalyn I don't know anything here. Here's a quick rundown.

it, it would've saved me some embarrassment, but I also, probably could have done a bit in more research myself. But my, my agent's amazing. I, have had a really great experience and I'm really happy with the decision that I made. I have been lucky enough to sell several more books since, um, the storm Crow came out and have had pretty smooth submission processes.

Like even the one that took a lot longer, was like fairly painless. As painless, I guess a sub could be, but I've still been pretty surprised by. Just how many steps there are to getting a yes in publishing

[00:12:43] **Sarah:** Mm-hmm.

[00:12:44] **Kalyn:** like I a Yes isn't a final thing. A yes is a acceptance to the next stage in the process. And there's a stage after that and there's a stage after that and every house does things a little bit differently.

So having now assigned with three separate publishers in, in my career, Seeing the submission process and the publishing process after signing and, and before signing. There's just so many hurdles and, and every time it just makes me like more astounded that any of us ever get books published. Cause you, you really need the stars to align. Honestly, I think one of the things that surprises me most is just that I have the opportunity to do this because of that. Like knowing what has to happen in order to get to where I am. yeah, mostly I'm just shocked that I'm here.

[00:13:33] **Sarah:** Yeah. Even within publishers in different imprints, the process is sometimes different, which is so weird.

[00:13:41] **Kalyn:** Yeah. And it's so, you know, not opaque. I mean, it is a little bit opaque, especially as the author. I mean, I'm sure as an agent you probably have more insight into that minutiae of the steps that go on, on the other side. but I think from the author side, sometimes it feels a little bit mysterious.

And like you, you jump from one goalpost to another suddenly, and, and there were 15 emails in between that. But on in your perspective, it's just been, you know, silence.

[00:14:03] **Sarah:** Mm-hmm. It is time for the quick round. I call it author, d n a. Are you a pantsner or a plotter?

[00:14:09] **Kalyn:** Plotter, recently reformed.

[00:14:11] **Sarah:** Do you tend to be an overwriter or an underwriter?

[00:14:14] **Kalyn:** Definitely overwriter

[00:14:15] **Sarah:** do you prefer to write in the morning or at nighttime

[00:14:18] **Kalyn:** Prefer the morning. Usually end up at night cuz of work

[00:14:21] **Sarah:** when starting a new project, do you typically start with a character plot or concept or something else first?

[00:14:27] **Kalyn:** concept, usually the magic concept.

[00:14:29] **Sarah:** Hmm. Do you prefer coffee or tea?

[00:14:31] **Kalyn:** Definitely tea.

[00:14:32] **Sarah:** Do you prefer silence or some kind of sound when you're writing?

[00:14:36] **Kalyn:** Silence.

[00:14:37] **Sarah:** When it comes to the first draft, are you a get it down kind of person or a get it right kind of person?

[00:14:42] **Kalyn:** Get it right. Definitely to my detriment.

[00:14:44] **Sarah:** What tools or software do you use to draft?

[00:14:47] **Kalyn:** Uh, just word

[00:14:48] **Sarah:** Do you prefer drafting or revising more?

[00:14:50] **Kalyn:** revising

[00:14:52] **Sarah:** Do you write in sequential order or do you hop around?

[00:14:54] **Kalyn:** sequential order.

[00:14:55] **Sarah:** And final quick round question. Are you an extrovert or an introvert?

[00:15:00] **Kalyn:** Uh, introvert, who's really good at pretending to be an extrovert

[00:15:04] **Sarah:** Now we're gonna talk about the second Q of the podcast. What were some of the qualms or worries you had on your journey, and do you feel like they were realized or you overcame them, or how did they shake out?

[00:15:14] **Kalyn:** I think to a degree, I was just so out of the loop that I didn't even need. I didn't know what I needed to worry about during my querying process. Because I was just so unformed. It was actually kind of nice in that sense, you know, like I, I didn't understand exactly, you know, how big the mistakes I were making were and what impact they could have.

and to that degree it, when I reached book four, I, I did finally start to realize like, Hey, maybe you shouldn't query the same agent with four different books. They might notice. And, but, you know, by that point I, I'd learned a lot more about the process. Um, And I definitely had, you know, the, I think pretty common, just like, what if none of these books are ever gonna be good enough

[00:15:55] **Sarah:** Mm-hmm.

[00:15:56] **Kalyn:** you know, by that point, having been on my fourth book, A large part of that, looking back now I can recognize was because I wasn't ready to query at least the first two.

but at the time felt very much like, how many of these am I gonna have to do? thankfully the answer was not more than four. But, since then, I think one of the, the biggest kind of qualms or worries that's stuck with me as an author and that I several books in still think about a lot is just Once the book is out of my hands and it's in reader's hands. And just letting go and accepting that not everyone's going to like it. And just because you did something on purpose doesn't mean people are, are, you know, enjoy it or, or like it. And so, um, I definitely still

struggle with accepting that. Like, I can't explain every choice that I made and every reader's not gonna know why I did X instead of y.

and there are ultimately going to be things that could have been better in the book, but just. Either I didn't notice at the time during revisions or got lost through multiple drafts. Whatever it is, it's, it's out there. It's over. It's done there. There is no more chance to fix it, and I just have to accept that.

[00:17:03] **Sarah:** Yeah. Now it's time for the third Q of the podcast.

Do you have any writing quirks? Is there anything about your writing process that you think is kind of different or interesting or unique?

[00:17:12] **Kalyn:** My, like the overall answer to this is that my writing process is very boring. Like I don't listen to music, I have no writing snacks, I have no ritual or preamble or anything that goes into writing. Um, which partially I think might be because. I've just always, my process has been sneaking writing time in where I can, whether it's before I leave for work, if it's at lunch, or if it's after work when I get home.

And if I had to do all that setup, I think I would get caught up in the setup, which is part of the reason I've never tried Scribner. I think I would just get too into organizing things and like creating all these different flows and never actually write. One thing that I can think of with like my actual writing process that I've recently actually only really become fully aware of is that once I've written something in a certain way, it's almost impossible for my brain to think of alternatives

[00:18:08] **Sarah:** Mm-hmm.

[00:18:09] **Kalyn:** So what? That's part of why, like I have to get things right the first time because once I have it set down, that feels to me like the only answer. And I really need someone to go like, Hey, this isn't working. Have you considered X? And the moment they give me an alternative, even if I don't use it, it just removes that mental block in my brain and I can start generating new ideas.

Um, but up until that point, like I can, I can only see down my tunnel that has been built.

[00:18:36] **Sarah:** Hmm. Interesting. It's funny, the first thing that you're talking about, I had a conversation with Jonathan Mayberry and he said something very

similar. Like, he's intentionally not created a ritual around his writing so that he can just write anywhere he writes on airplanes, which is just mind boggling to me.

[00:18:54] **Kalyn:** Yeah.

[00:18:54] **Sarah:** Um, but yeah,

[00:18:56] **Kalyn:** impressive.

[00:18:56] **Sarah:** that's why he publishes so much.

[00:18:58] **Kalyn:** Yeah. Maybe.

[00:19:00] **Sarah:** Yeah. When you were in the lowest parts of your journey, what kept you going and why did you stick to it?

[00:19:06] **Kalyn:** I see there's, there's two parts to this. one is that it honestly never occurred to me that I could stop. writing is something that I was and still am very compelled to do, and I know that I c I couldn't just not do it like that. To some degrees has become a bit of an anxiety management technique for me, having the, the consistency of the writing in my life.

[00:19:27] **Sarah:** Hmm.

[00:19:27] **Kalyn:** but I also had set this goal and this idea for myself, and I am absolutely horrible at not completing tasks. Like there is nothing more satisfying to me than checking off a list of things that I need to do and just like doing each one and, and saying it's complete. And so, The idea that I just like wouldn't complete this task, didn't, didn't even occur, which again, I think is largely because I did not understand what I was doing.

I didn't realize the odds, I didn't realize the, the and the gates ahead of me. I really, I really stick with saying I bumbled my way through getting an agent. Um, and I lucked out. The Carrie's so amazing. but really, you know, past that querying process, I, I would actually say I've had much lower points since getting an agent than

[00:20:18] **Sarah:** Hmm.

[00:20:18] **Kalyn:** because of that.

and honestly, the answer is just my writing group and my writing friends. Like without them, the emotional toll would've been too much at multiple times. It's, it's, Having somebody who knows and understands what you're talking about and what you're going through, and just being able to go to them and be like, can I scream for a second?

and having them scream with you.

[00:20:38] **Sarah:** Yeah. Yeah. You talked about some of them, but if you have any more or you wanna elaborate, what are some of the biggest mistakes you feel like you made along the way?

[00:20:46] **Kalyn:** Yeah, definitely. The querying, multi manuscripts. Definitely querying before I was ready, not knowing enough about. What I was getting myself into, one thing, this is, this is post querying, but one thing that I've noticed is that multiple times shared too much information about an unreleased and unedited book. And then changed things later. But readers remember when I said I was gonna do this thing and they're like, Hey, that thing's not there, or whatever.

and so even now something that I, I, you know, I'm still learning parts of this process and one of them that I have recently been trying to remember is like, only share things that you're sure aren't going to change. That one actually came up a couple days ago, so that's why it's, it's fresh in my mind.

[00:21:27] **Sarah:** Nice. Can you share with listeners one of the most important lessons that you learned on your journey to publication?

[00:21:33] **Kalyn:** I cannot emphasize enough the subjectivity of this industry. Agents and editors or readers, and just like any reader, they may or may not enjoy one book that somebody else would like and vice versa. The same is true for acquiring them, and I think both my querying and my other submission journeys are good examples of that.

having one agent offer on the revised version and another agent offer on the unrevised version like that already is like, those were pretty drastically different books in terms of pacing and, and the plot. and the other agent's like, you know, honestly, I don't think you need to fix those things.

So, I mean, pretty drastic difference in terms of what they offered on. And then, in my submission journeys, so I have both a YA series coming out and a middle grade series that I'm in the midst of. My young adult editor read and rejected my

middle grade book and my middle grade reader or my middle grade editor read and rejected my way book.

[00:22:25] **Sarah:** Oh.

[00:22:26] **Kalyn:** Yeah, so it's very, very subjective. These are people who clearly liked my other work, but this didn't feel the same connection to the other

[00:22:33] **Sarah:** Mm-hmm.

[00:22:34] **Kalyn:** but obviously both worked out with both of them for the, the series that I am working with them on. But I always think that's a really, really great example of like, no, it, it, even an editor who you work really well with might not always click with every single book.

and that's just par for the course of the subjectivity of the industry.

[00:22:51] **Sarah:** It's fascinating too.

[00:22:52] **Kalyn:** Yeah. Yeah, exactly. and I would say I actually do have another piece of advice, because I think it, it particularly applies with a lot of what I've been talking about, which is that no writing you do is ever wasted. And whether that means you're just getting better with each book that you write.

You know, like four of them in a row in two years, or whether that means something you write might be useful again. So that second book that I queried did eventually become my middle grade book that's now out called Ravenal.

[00:23:23] **Sarah:** Hmm.

[00:23:23] **Kalyn:** So that book that I thought like, oh, it was just part of my, my querying journey.

And I put it aside, I revisited after the storm Crow came out and was like, okay, the idea here actually is good. I just wrote a middle grade book as a YA and had a really horrible romance in it. And if I take that out, it might actually be good for middle grade. and obviously that did ultimately sell.

So like not only did that book teach me a lot about writing and make me a better writer, it also was able to be given new life in the future.

[00:23:52] **Sarah:** Mm-hmm. This is not a business that most of us succeed in completely on our own. So who are some of the people who helped you along the way and how?

[00:24:01] **Kalyn:** like I mentioned earlier, definitely my writing group. our name is the, we call ourselves the guillotine Queens. Um, and I, I know, right? Um, is our, our, our tag is, it's all on the execution,

[00:24:13] **Sarah:** Oh

[00:24:14] **Kalyn:** which, which honestly

[00:24:16] **Sarah:** love it.

[00:24:17] **Kalyn:** that. Right. It's something we remind each other of a lot too, because you know, so often you will be working on an idea and then you'll see something on Twitter about someone working on something that sounds very similar, or a book comes out that gets announced and you're like, that's exactly my idea.

[00:24:30] **Sarah:** Yeah.

[00:24:31] **Kalyn:** But because two people can tell the same story so dramatically differently, it's important to remember that it's all in the execution. It matters how you do it. and that is just one piece of wisdom that they have given me across the last, I was just realizing this today, five years that we've been a writing group.

I met them shortly after Storm Cross sold in 2017. It. Would not have been possible. None of this process would've been possible for me without them. they're honestly amazing. And the same can be said for some of the people that I've debuted with, and writers I've met in other mentorship contests.

Just people who are in the same stage as you, you know, so they know exactly what you're going through. But. Honestly, I, I can't imagine having done this without all of those people in my corner.

[00:25:20] **Sarah:** Yeah. Yeah. All right. Before you go, since we heard a little bit about your YA series, do you wanna tell us about your middle gate series?

[00:25:28] **Kalyn:** Yes. Uh, so Ravenfall, which released in, oh gosh, what is time? September of last year, 2022, is. A spooky middle grade fantasy series

that's like Supernatural meets Encanto. It's about a family of psychics who live at as Sentient Inn at the crossroads of the human world and the other world,

[00:25:49] **Sarah:** Hmm.

[00:25:49] **Kalyn:** boy who comes to them for helps solving a magical family mystery.

So it's got like a very heavy autumn aesthetic. lots of supernatural references and it deals a lot with, uh, Irish mythology and the sequel for that called Hathorne Releases in October. that. In comparison, I'm calling Supernatural meets Indiana Jones, and it's, it's very wintry and it's all about Jewish mythology.

[00:26:12] **Sarah:** All right, cool. Well, thank you for coming on the show and sharing your story with everyone.

[00:26:17] **Kalyn:** Yeah. Thank you for having me.

[00:26:18] **Sarah:** Thank you so much for listening to this episode of Queries Qualms and Quirks. You can find the text of Kalyn's query in the show notes along with links to find out more about her and her books.

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