

ЭДВАРД БУЛЬВЕР-ЛИТТОН

**THE DISOWNED —
VOLUME 04**

Эдвард Бульвер-Литтон
The Disowned — Volume 04

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Edward Bulwer-Lytton

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CHAPTER XXXVII

What a charming character is a kind old man.
—STEPHEN MONTAGUE.

"Cheer up, my dear boy," said Talbot, kindly, "we must never despair. What though Lady Westborough has forbidden you the boudoir, a boudoir is a very different thing from a daughter, and you have no right to suppose that the veto extends to both. But now that we are on this subject, do let me reason with you seriously. Have you not already tasted all the pleasures, and been sufficiently annoyed by some of the pains, of acting the 'Incognito'? Be ruled by me: resume your proper name; it is at least one which the proudest might acknowledge; and its discovery will remove the greatest obstacle to the success which you so ardently desire."

Clarence, who was labouring under strong excitement, paused for some moments, as if to collect himself, before he replied: "I have been thrust from my father's home; I have been made the victim of another's crime; I have been denied the rights and name of son; perhaps (and I say this bitterly) justly denied them, despite of my own innocence. What would you have me do? Resume a name never conceded to me,—perhaps not righteously mine,—thrust myself upon the unwilling and shrinking hands which disowned and rejected me; blazon my virtues by pretensions which I myself have promised to forego, and foist myself on the notice of strangers by the very claims which my nearest relations dispute? Never! never! never! With the simple name I have assumed; the friend I myself have won,—you, my generous benefactor, my real father, who never forsook nor insulted me for my misfortunes,—with these I have gained some steps in the ladder; with these, and those gifts of nature, a stout heart and a willing hand, of which none can rob me, I will either ascend the rest, even to the summit, or fall to the dust, unknown, but not contemned; unlamented, but not despised."

"Well, well," said Talbot, brushing away a tear which he could not deny to the feeling, even while he disputed the judgment, of the young adventurer,—"well, this is all very fine and very foolish; but you shall never want friend or father while I live, or when I have ceased to live; but come,—sit down, share my dinner, which is not very good, and my dessert, which is: help me to entertain two or three guests who are coming to me in the evening, to talk on literature, sup, and sleep; and to-morrow you shall return home, and see Lady Flora in the drawing-room if you cannot in the boudoir."

And Clarence was easily persuaded to accept the invitation. Talbot was not one of those men who are forced to exert themselves to be entertaining. He had the pleasant and easy way of imparting his great general and curious information, that a man, partly humourist, partly philosopher, who values himself on being a man of letters, and is in spite of himself a man of the world, always ought to possess. Clarence was soon beguiled from the remembrance of his mortifications, and, by little and little, entirely yielded to the airy and happy flow of Talbot's conversation.

In the evening, three or four men of literary eminence (as many as Talbot's small Tusculum would accommodate with beds) arrived, and in a conversation, free alike from the jargon of pedants and the insipidities of fashion, the night fled away swiftly and happily, even to the lover.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

We are here (in the country) among the vast and noble scenes of Nature; we are there (in the town) among the pitiful shifts of policy. We walk here in the light and open ways of the divine bounty,—we grope therein the dark and confused labyrinths of human malice; our senses are here feasted with all the clear and genuine taste of their objects, which are all sophisticated there, and for the most part overwhelmed with their contraries: here pleasure, methinks, looks like a beautiful, constant, and modest wife; it is there an impudent, fickle, and painted harlot.
—COWLEY.

Draw up the curtain! The scene is the Opera.

The pit is crowded; the connoisseurs in the front row are in a very ill humour. It must be confessed that extreme heat is a little trying to the temper of a critic.

The Opera then was not what it is now, nor even what it had been in a former time. It is somewhat amusing to find Goldsmith questioning, in one of his essays, whether the Opera could ever become popular in England. But on the night—on which the reader is summoned to that "theatre of sweet sounds" a celebrated singer from the Continent made his first appearance in London, and all the world thronged to "that odious Opera-house" to hear, or to say they had heard, the famous Sopraniello.

With a nervous step, Clarence proceeded to Lady Westborough's box; and it was many minutes that he lingered by the door before he summoned courage to obtain admission.

He entered; the box was crowded; but Lady Flora was not there. Lord Borodaile was sitting next to Lady Westborough. As Clarence entered, Lord Borodaile raised his eyebrows, and Lady Westborough her glass. However disposed a great person may be to drop a lesser one, no one of real birth or breeding ever cuts another. Lady Westborough, therefore, though much colder, was no less civil than usual; and Lord Borodaile bowed lower than ever to Mr. Linden, as he punctiliously called him. But Clarence's quick eye discovered instantly that he was no welcome intruder, and that his day with the beautiful marchioness was over. His visit, consequently, was short and embarrassed. When he left the box, he heard Lord Borodaile's short, slow, sneering laugh, followed by Lady Westborough's "hush" of reproof.

His blood boiled. He hurried along the passage, with his eyes fixed upon the ground and his hand clenched.

"What ho! Linden, my good fellow; why, you look as if all the ferocity of the great Figg were in your veins," cried a good-humoured voice.

Clarence started, and saw the young and high-spirited Duke of Haverfield.

"Are you going behind the scenes?" said his grace. "I have just come thence; and you had much better drop into La Meronville's box with me. You sup with her to-night, do you not?"

"No, indeed!" replied Clarence; "I scarcely know her, except by sight."

"Well, and what think you of her?"

"That she is the prettiest Frenchwoman I ever saw."

"Commend me to secret sympathies!" cried the duke. "She has asked me three times who you were, and told me three times you were the handsomest man in London and had quite a foreign air; the latter recommendation being of course far greater than the former. So, after this, you cannot refuse to accompany me to her box and make her acquaintance."

"Nay," answered Clarence, "I shall be too happy to profit by the taste of so discerning a person; but it is cruel in you, Duke, not to feign a little jealousy,—a little reluctance to introduce so formidable a rival."

"Oh, as to me," said the duke, "I only like her for her mental, not her personal, attractions. She is very agreeable, and a little witty; sufficient attractions for one in her situation."

"But do tell me a little of her history," said Clarence, "for, in spite of her renown, I only know her as La belle Meronville. Is she not living en ami with some one of our acquaintance?"

"To be sure," replied the duke, "with Lord Borodaile. She is prodigiously extravagant; and Borodaile affects to be prodigiously fond: but as there is only a certain fund of affection in the human heart, and all Lord Borodaile's is centred in Lord Borodaile, that cannot really be the case."

"Is he jealous of her?" said Clarence.

"Not in the least! nor indeed, does she give him any cause. She is very gay, very talkative, gives excellent suppers, and always has her box at the Opera crowded with admirers; but that is all. She encourages many, and favours but one. Happy Borodaile! My lot is less fortunate! You know, I suppose, that Julia has deserted me?"

"You astonish me,—and for what?"

"Oh, she told me, with a vehement burst of tears, that she was convinced I did not love her, and that a hundred pounds a month was not sufficient to maintain a milliner's apprentice. I answered the first assertion by an assurance that I adored her: but I preserved a total silence with regard to the latter; and so I found Trevanion tete-a-tete with her the next day."

"What did you?" said Clarence.

"Sent my valet to Trevanion with an old coat of mine, my compliments, and my hopes that, as Mr. Trevanion was so fond of my cast-off conveniences, he would honour me by accepting the accompanying trifle."

"He challenged you, without doubt?"

"Challenged me! No: he tells all his friends that I am the wittiest man in Europe."

"A fool can speak the truth, you see," said Clarence, laughing.

"Thank you, Linden; you shall have my good word with La Meronville for that: mais allons."

Mademoiselle de la Meronville, as she pointedly entitled herself, was one of those charming adventuresses, who, making the most of a good education and a prepossessing person, a delicate turn for letter-writing, and a lively vein of conversation, came to England for a year or two, as Spaniards were wont to go to Mexico, and who return to their native country with a profound contempt for the barbarians whom they have so egregiously despoiled. Mademoiselle de la Meronville was small, beautifully formed, had the prettiest hands and feet in the world, and laughed musically. By the by, how difficult it is to laugh, or even to smile, at once naturally and gracefully! It is one of Steele's finest touches of character, where he says of Will Honeycombe, "He can smile when one speaks to him, and laughs easily."

In a word, the pretty Frenchwoman was precisely formed to turn the head of a man like Lord Borodaile, who loved to be courted and who required to be amused. Mademoiselle de la Meronville received Clarence with a great deal of grace, and a little reserve, the first chiefly natural, the last wholly artificial.

"Well," said the duke (in French), "you have not told me who are to be of your party this evening,—Borodaile, I suppose, of course?"

"No, he cannot come to-night."

"Ah, quel malheur! then the hock will not be iced enough: Borodaile's looks are the best wine-coolers in the world."

"Fie!" cried La Meronville, glancing towards Clarence, "I cannot endure your malevolence; wit makes you very bitter."

"And that is exactly the reason why La belle Meronville loves me so: nothing is so sweet to one person as bitterness upon another; it is human nature and French nature (which is a very different thing) into the bargain."

"Bah! my Lord Duke, you judge of others by yourself."

"To be sure I do," cried the duke; "and that is the best way of forming a right judgment. Ah! what a foot, that little figurante has; you don't admire her, Linden?"

"No, Duke; my admiration is like the bird in the cage,—chained here, and cannot fly away!" answered Clarence, with a smile at the frippery of his compliment.

"Ah, Monsieur," cried the pretty Frenchwoman, leaning back, "you have been at Paris, I see: one does not learn those graces of language in England. I have been five months in your country; brought over the prettiest dresses imaginable, and have only received three compliments, and (pity me!) two out of the three were upon my pronunciation of 'How do you do?'"

"Well," said Clarence, "I should have imagined that in England, above all other countries, your vanity would have been gratified, for you know we pique ourselves on our sincerity, and say all we think."

"Yes? then you always think very unpleasantly. What an alternative! which is the best, to speak ill or to think ill of one?"

"Pour l'amour de Dieu," cried the duke, "don't ask such puzzling questions; "you are always getting into those moral subtleties, which I suppose you learn from Borodaile. He is a wonderful metaphysician, I hear; I can answer for his chemical powers: the moment he enters a room the very walls grow damp; as for me, I dissolve; I should flow into a fountain, like Arethusa, if happily his lordship did not freeze one again into substance as fast as he dampens one into thaw."

"Fi donc!" cried La Meronville. "I should be very angry had you not taught me to be very indifferent—"

"To him!" said the duke, dryly. "I'm glad to hear it. He is not worth une grande passion, believe me; but tell me, ma belle, who else sups with you?"

"D'abord, Monsieur Linden, I trust," answered La Meronville, with a look of invitation, to which Clarence bowed and smiled his assent,

"Milord D——, and Monsieur Trevanion, Mademoiselle Caumartin, and Le Prince Pietro del Ordino."

"Nothing can be better arranged," said the duke. "But see, they are just going to drop the curtain. Let me call your carriage."

"You are too good, milord," replied La Meronville, with a bow which said, "of course;" and the duke, who would not have stirred three paces for the first princess of the blood, hurried out of the box (despite of Clarence's offer to undertake the commission) to inquire after the carriage of the most notorious adventuress of the day.

Clarence was alone in the box with the beautiful Frenchwoman. To say truth, Linden was far too much in love with Lady Flora, and too occupied, as to his other thoughts, with the projects of ambition, to be easily led into any disreputable or criminal liaison; he therefore conversed with his usual ease, though with rather more than his usual gallantry, without feeling the least touched by the charms of La Meronville or the least desirous of supplanting Lord Borodaile in her favour.

The duke reappeared, and announced the carriage. As, with La Meronville leaning on his arm, Clarence hurried out, he accidentally looked up, and saw on the head of the stairs Lady Westborough with her party (Lord Borodaile among the rest) in waiting for her carriage. For almost the first time in his life, Clarence felt ashamed of himself; his cheek burned like fire, and he involuntarily let go the fair hand which was leaning upon his arm. However, the weaker our course the better face we should put upon it, and Clarence, recovering his presence of mind, and vainly hoping he had not been perceived, buried his face as well as he was able in the fur collar of his cloak, and hurried on.

"You saw Lord Borodaile?" said the duke to La Meronville, as he handed her into her carriage.

"Yes, I accidentally looked back after we had passed him, and then I saw him."

"Looked back!" said the duke; "I wonder he did not turn you into a pillar of salt."

"Fi donc!" cried La belle Meronville, tapping his grace playfully on the arm, in order to do which she was forced to lean a little harder upon Clarence's, which she had not yet relinquished—"Fi donc! Francois, chez moi!"

"My carriage is just behind," said the duke. "You will go with me to La Meronville's, of course?"

"Really, my dear duke," said Clarence, "I wish I could excuse myself from this party. I have another engagement."

"Excuse yourself? and leave me to the mercy of Mademoiselle Caumartin, who has the face of an ostrich, and talks me out of breath! Never, my dear Linden, never! Besides, I want you to see how well I shall behave to Trevanion. Here is the carriage. Entrez, mon cher."

And Clarence, weakly and foolishly (but he was very young and very unhappy, and so, longing for an escape from his own thoughts) entered the carriage, and drove to the supper party, in order to prevent the Duke of Haverfield being talked out of breath by Mademoiselle Caumartin, who had the face of an ostrich.

CHAPTER XXXIX

*Yet truth is keenly sought for, and the wind
Charged with rich words, poured out in thought's
defence;
Whether the Church inspire that eloquence,
Or a Platonic piety, confined
To the sole temple of the inward mind;
And one there is who builds immortal lays,
Though doomed to tread in solitary ways;
Darkness before, and danger's voice behind!
Yet not alone*

— WORDSWORTH.

London, thou Niobe, who sittest in stone, amidst thy stricken and fated children; nurse of the desolate, that hidest in thy bosom the shame, the sorrows, the sins of many sons; in whose arms the fallen and the outcast shroud their distresses, and shelter from the proud man's contumely; Epitome and Focus of the disparities and maddening contrasts of this wrong world, that assemblest together in one great heap the woes, the joys, the elevations, the debasements of the various tribes of man; mightiest of levellers, confounding in thy whirlpool all ranks, all minds, the graven labours of knowledge, the straws of the maniac, purple and rags, the regalities and the loathsomeness of earth, —palace and lazar-house combined! Grave of the living, where, mingled and massed together, we couch, but rest not,—"for in that sleep of life what dreams do come,"—each vexed with a separate vision,—"shadows" which "grieve the heart," unreal in their substance, but faithful in their warnings, flitting from the eye, but graving unfleeting memories on the mind, which reproduce new dreams over and over, until the phantasm ceases, and the pall of a heavier torpor falls upon the brain, and all is still and dark and hushed! "From the stir of thy great Babel," and the fixed tinsel glare in which sits pleasure like a star, "which shines, but warms not with its powerless rays," we turn to thy deeper and more secret haunts. Thy wilderness is all before us—where to choose our place of rest; and, to our eyes, thy hidden recesses are revealed.

The clock of St. Paul's had tolled the second hour of morning. Within a small and humble apartment in the very heart of the city, there sat a writer, whose lucubrations, then obscure and unknown, were destined, years afterwards, to excite the vague admiration of the crowd and the deeper homage of the wise. They were of that nature which is slow in winning its way to popular esteem; the result of the hived and hoarded knowledge of years; the produce of deep thought and sublime aspirations, influencing, in its bearings, the interests of the many, yet only capable of analysis by the judgment of the few. But the stream broke forth at last from the cavern to the daylight, although the source was never traced; or, to change the image,—albeit none know the hand which executed and the head which designed, the monument of a mighty intellect has been at length dug up, as it were, from the envious earth, the brighter for its past obscurity, and the more certain of immortality from the temporary neglect it has sustained.

The room was, as we before said, very small, and meanly furnished; yet were there a few articles of costliness and luxury scattered about, which told that the tastes of its owner had not been quite humbled to the level of his fortunes. One side of the narrow chamber was covered with shelves, which supported books in various languages, and though chiefly on scientific subjects, not utterly confined to them. Among the doctrines of the philosopher, and the golden rules of the moralist, were also seen the pleasant dreams of poets, the legends of Spenser, the refining moralities of Pope, the lofty errors

of Lucretius, and the sublime relics of our "dead kings of melody." [Shakspeare and Milton] And over the hearth was a picture, taken in more prosperous days, of one who had been and was yet to the tenant of that abode, better than fretted roofs and glittering banquets, the objects of ambition, or even the immortality of fame. It was the face of one very young and beautiful, and the deep, tender eyes looked down, as with a watchful fondness, upon the lucubrator and his labours. While beneath the window, which was left unclosed, for it was scarcely June, were simple yet not inelegant vases, filled with flowers,—

"Those lovely leaves, where we
May read how soon things have
Their end, though ne'er so brave." [Herrick]

The writer was alone, and had just paused from his employment; he was leaning his face upon one hand, in a thoughtful and earnest mood, and the air which came chill, but gentle, from the window, slightly stirred the locks from the broad and marked brow, over which they fell in thin but graceful waves. Partly owing perhaps to the waning light of the single lamp and the lateness of the hour, his cheek seemed very pale, and the complete though contemplative rest of the features partook greatly of the quiet of habitual sadness, and a little of the languor of shaken health; yet the expression, despite the proud cast of the brow and profile, was rather benevolent than stern or dark in its pensiveness, and the lines spoke more of the wear and harrow of deep thought than the inroads of ill-regulated passion.

There was a slight tap at the door; the latch was raised, and the original of the picture I have described entered the apartment.

Time had not been idle with her since that portrait had been taken: the round elastic figure had lost much of its youth and freshness; the step, though light, was languid, and in the centre of the fair, smooth cheek, which was a little sunken, burned one deep bright spot,—fatal sign to those who have watched the progress of the most deadly and deceitful of our national maladies; yet still the form and countenance were eminently interesting and lovely; and though the bloom was gone forever, the beauty, which not even death could wholly have despoiled, remained to triumph over debility, misfortune, and disease.

She approached the student, and laid her hand upon his shoulder.

"Dearest!" said he, tenderly yet reproachfully, "yet up, and the hour so late and yourself so weak? Fie, I must learn to scold you."

"And how," answered the intruder, "how could I sleep or rest while you are consuming your very life in those thankless labours?"

"By which," interrupted the writer, with a faint smile, "we glean our scanty subsistence."

"Yes," said the wife (for she held that relation to the student), and the tears stood in her eyes, "I know well that every morsel of bread, every drop of water, is wrung from your very heart's blood, and I—I am the cause of all; but surely you exert yourself too much, more than can be requisite? These night damps, this sickly and chilling air, heavy with the rank vapours of the coming morning, are not suited to thoughts and toils which are alone sufficient to sear your mind and exhaust your strength. Come, my own love, to bed; and yet first come and look upon our child, how sound she sleeps! I have leaned over her for the last hour, and tried to fancy it was you whom I watched, for she has learned already your smile and has it even when she sleeps."

"She has cause to smile," said the husband, bitterly.

"She has, for she is yours! and even in poetry and humble hopes, that is an inheritance which may well teach her pride and joy. Come, love, the air is keen, and the damp rises to your forehead, —yet stay, till I have kissed it away."

"Mine own love," said the student, as he rose and wound his arm round the slender waist of his wife, "wrap your shawl closer over your bosom, and let us look for one instant upon the night. I cannot sleep till I have slaked the fever of my blood: the air has nothing of coldness in its breath for me."

And they walked to the window and looked forth. All was hushed and still in the narrow street; the cold gray clouds were hurrying fast along the sky; and the stars, weak and waning in their light, gleamed forth at rare intervals upon the mute city, like expiring watch-lamps of the dead.

They leaned out and spoke not; but when they looked above upon the melancholy heavens, they drew nearer to each other, as if it were their natural instinct to do so whenever the world without seemed discouraging and sad.

At length the student broke the silence; but his thoughts, which were wandering and disjointed, were breathed less to her than vaguely and unconsciously to himself. "Morn breaks,—another and another!—day upon day!—while we drag on our load like the blind beast which knows not when the burden shall be cast off and the hour of rest be come."

The woman pressed her hand to her bosom, but made no rejoinder—she knew his mood—and the student continued,—"And so life frets itself away! Four years have passed over our seclusion—four years! a great segment in the little circle of our mortality; and of those years what day has pleasure won from labour, or what night has sleep snatched wholly from the lamp? Weaker than the miser, the insatiable and restless mind traverses from east to west; and from the nooks, and corners, and crevices of earth collects, fragment by fragment, grain by grain, atom by atom, the riches which it gathers to its coffers—for what?—to starve amidst the plenty! The fantasies of the imagination bring a ready and substantial return: not so the treasures of thought. Better that I had renounced the soul's labour for that of its hardier frame—better that I had 'sweated in the eye of Phoebus,' than 'eat my heart with crosses and with cares,'—seeking truth and wanting bread—adding to the indigence of poverty its humiliation; wroth with the arrogance of men, who weigh in the shallow scales of their meagre knowledge the product of lavish thought, and of the hard hours for which health, and sleep, and spirit have been exchanged;— sharing the lot of those who would enchant the old serpent of evil, which refuses the voice of the charmer!—struggling against the prejudice and bigoted delusion of the bandaged and fettered herd to whom, in our fond hopes and aspirations, we trusted to give light and freedom; seeing the slavish judgments we would have redeemed from error clashing their chains at us in ire;—made criminal by our very benevolence;—the martyrs whose zeal is rewarded with persecution, whose prophecies are crowned with contempt!—Better, oh, better that I had not listened to the vanity of a heated brain—better that I had made my home with the lark and the wild bee, among the fields and the quiet hills, where life, if obscurer, is less debased, and hope, if less eagerly indulged, is less bitterly disappointed. The frame, it is true, might have been bowed to a harsher labour, but the heart would at least have had its rest from anxiety, and the mind its relaxation from thought."

The wife's tears fell upon the hand she clasped. The student turned, and his heart smote him for the selfishness of his complaint. He drew her closer and closer to his bosom; and gazing fondly upon those eyes which years of indigence and care might have robbed of their young lustre, but not of their undying tenderness, he kissed away her tears, and addressed her in a voice which never failed to charm her grief into forgetfulness.

"Dearest and kindest," he said, "was I not to blame for accusing those privations or regrets which have only made us love each other the more? Trust me, mine own treasure, that it is only in the peevishness of an inconstant and fretful humour that I have murmured against my fortune. For, in the midst of all, I look upon you, my angel, my comforter, my young dream of love, which God, in His mercy, breathed into waking life—I look upon you, and am blessed and grateful. Nor in my juster moments do I accuse even the nature of these studies, though they bring us so scanty a reward. Have I not hours of secret and overflowing delight, the triumphs of gratified research—flashes of sudden light, which reward the darkness of thought, and light up my solitude as a revel?—These feelings of rapture, which nought but Science can afford, amply repay her disciples for worse evils and severer

handships than it has been my destiny to endure. Look along the sky, how the vapours struggle with the still yet feeble stars: even so have the mists of error been pierced, though not scattered, by the dim but holy lights of past wisdom, and now the morning is at hand, and in that hope we journey on, doubtful, but not utterly in darkness. Nor is this all my hope; there is a loftier and more steady comfort than that which mere philosophy can bestow. If the certainty of future fame bore Milton rejoicing through his blindness, or cheered Galileo in his dungeon, what stronger and holier support shall not be given to him who has loved mankind as his brothers, and devoted his labours to their cause?— who has not sought, but relinquished, his own renown?—who has braved the present censures of men for their future benefit, and trampled upon glory in the energy of benevolence? Will there not be for him something more powerful than fame to comfort his sufferings and to sustain his hopes? If the wish of mere posthumous honour be a feeling rather vain than exalted, the love of our race affords us a more rational and noble desire of remembrance. Come what will, that love, if it animates our toils and directs our studies, shall when we are dust make our relics of value, our efforts of avail, and consecrate the desire of fame, which were else a passion selfish and impure, by connecting it with the welfare of ages and the eternal interests of the world and its Creator! Come, we will to bed."

CHAPTER XL

A man may be formed by nature for an admirable citizen, and yet, from the purest motives, be a dangerous one to the State in which the accident of birth has placed him.

—*STEPHEN MONTAGUE.*

The night again closed., and the student once more resumed his labours. The spirit of his hope and comforter of his toils sat by him, ever and anon lifting her fond eyes from her work to gaze upon his countenance, to sigh, and to return sadly and quietly to her employment.

A heavy step ascended the stairs, the door opened, and the tall figure of Wolfe, the republican, presented itself. The female rose, pushed a chair towards him with a smile and grace suited to better fortunes, and, retiring from the table, reseated herself silent and apart.

"It is a fine night," said the student, when the mutual greetings were over. "Whence come you?"

"From contemplating human misery and worse than human degradation," replied Wolfe, slowly seating himself.

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