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## Past As An Alibi For Reclusive Nature In Fangirl

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### Abstract:

Children often tend to blame their parents, their past experiences or childhood trauma for their behavioural pattern. But this research paper is to prove otherwise and to throw light on the other side of the coin that how they play this blame game to justify their actions. Children who rely on their past experiences are subjected to prove unsuccessful in their future. The state of being gaiety relies upon each individual rather than his distressing experiences in the past.

### Introduction:

Psychology is about understanding one's mind and how it impacts one's behaviour. It is very much essential in understanding human lives as it offers insights into one's experiences, helps one connect with others and helps people live better lives.

A psychological approach can be defined as a perspective based on certain assumptions, about behaviour. Each approach has shared ideas about how to describe, predict, and explain behaviour. An approach contains many different theories but they all share the same assumptions. The aim of psychological study folds in three natures. Foremost, the objective of understanding behaviour that is, by defining factors that combine the development and expression of behaviour. Secondly, the psychologist striving to develop procedure for the accurate prediction of behaviour. Thirdly, psychology aims at developing techniques that will permit the control

of behaviour that is, way of “shaping” or course of psychological development through manipulating those basic factors to the growth and the expression of behaviour.

The forerunner of psychological approach is Sigmund Freud. His theory of psychoanalysis is one of the biggest milestones in the field of psychology. This approach bases once behaviour through his childhood experiences. That is, to make sense of one’s actions in the present there is a necessity to look back at his childhood. The approach believes that one’s choices are heavily influenced by one’s unconscious mind. Later evolved many theories based on psychological approach like the theories of Carl Jung, Alfred Adler and so on which are remarkable since time immemorial.

literature intertwines with fields such as history, philosophy and sociology it also has a very strong correlation with psychology as well. Both Literature and psychology deal with human beings and their reactions, perceptions of the world, wishes, miseries, fears, conflicts, desires and reconciliations. An author represents life according to his objectives, ideologies, perceptions and value judgements, thus opening the doors of the unknown and the invisible worlds to the readers, not only by arousing feelings and emotions, but also by aiding them to discover the truest meaning of life and existence. Similarly in the psychological approach the author’s perceptions, conscious or unconscious mind, dreams, the differences between the personality of the author and the author in the text are taken into consideration.

The link between psychology and literature is multifaceted and complex. Literature can be seen as a way of exploring the human mind and psyche, often in a more personal way in a traditional psychological research. It can also be used as a tool for understanding human behaviour and motivations providing insight into complex psychological phenomena. On the other hand, Psychology can be used to interpret and analyse the literary works providing a deep understanding of characters and themes to the readers. Also, literature and psychology can be combined together and used in therapeutic contexts. For instance, creative writing and storytelling maybe used as therapeutic tools to help individuals express and process their feelings and thoughts. Additionally, bibliotherapy is a form of therapy in which literary works are used to help individuals explore their emotions and experiences. Overall the relationship between psychology and literature is rich and complex as both the fields offer valuable insights into human experience.

Adlerian Theory:

Adlerian theory refers to a psychological practice that emphasizes on the belief that, seeking for validation, connection are made to feel significant. This theory also focusses on the necessity of having a sense of community. According to Adler, those who have this sense of belongingness will function cooperatively and form healthy and loving relationships with others. But on the contrary, those individuals who feel like a castaway will tend to express the feeling of dearth.

Adler puts forth that humans are subjective beings and are strongly influenced by their personality and their surroundings. Thereby, this theory got its name as “Individual Psychology”. There are four factors which serve as the mainsprings of Adlerian theory. They are as follows:

- The purposiveness of behavior
- A person’s style of life
- The social enclosedness (verify)of an individual
- Social interest which is the determining factor for the mental health of a person

Adler believed that there is a constant interaction between individuals and environment which has a great impact on their perceptions, actions, experiences and personality. This is a kind of symbiotic relationship which helps in the individual’s growth and evolution throughout his lifespan. To Adler, people are born with weak, inferior bodies which eventually lead to feelings of inferiority and a resulting dependence on other people. That being the case, a feeling of unity with others that is “social interest” is intrinsic in people which is the ultimate standard for psychological health. The main tenets of Adlerian theory are listed below:

- The one dynamic force behind people’s behavior is the *striving for success or superiority*.
- People’s *subjective perceptions* shape their behavior and personality.
- Personality is *unified* and *self-consistent*.
- The value of all human activity must be seen from the viewpoint of *social interest*.
- The self-consistent personality structure develops into a person’s *style of life*.
- Style of life is molded by people’s *creative power*.

## STRIVING FOR SUCCESS OR SUPERIORITY:

Early in his career, Adler believed the most driving force behind all motivation was *aggression* but soon he became dissatisfied with this term. Then, he reduced all motivation to a single drive- the striving for success or superiority. Individual psychology holds that every individual begins life with physical deficiencies which activate feelings of inferiority which motivates a person for either success or superiority. Psychologically unhealthy individuals strive for personal superiority whereas psychologically healthy people seek success for all humanity.

## SUBJECTIVE PERCEPTIONS:

To compensate the feelings of inferiority, people strive for superiority or success, but the manner in which they strive is not shaped by reality but by their subjective perceptions of reality, that is, by their *fictions or expectations of the future*.

## UNITY AND SELF-CONSISTENCY OF PERSONALITY:

In choosing the term individual psychology, Adler wished to lay emphasis on his belief that each person is unique and indivisible thus insisting on the fundamental unity of personality and the idea that inconsistent behavior does not exist.

## SOCIAL INTEREST:

Social interest is Adler's translation of the German term, *Gemeinschaftsgefühl* which is somewhat misleading. The more apt translation might be "*social feeling*" or "*community feeling*". Social interest can be defined as an attitude of relatedness with humanity in general as well as an empathy for each member of the human community. It manifests itself as cooperation with others for social advancement rather than for personal gain. Social interest is the natural condition of the human species and the adhesive that binds the society together.

## STYLE OF LIFE:

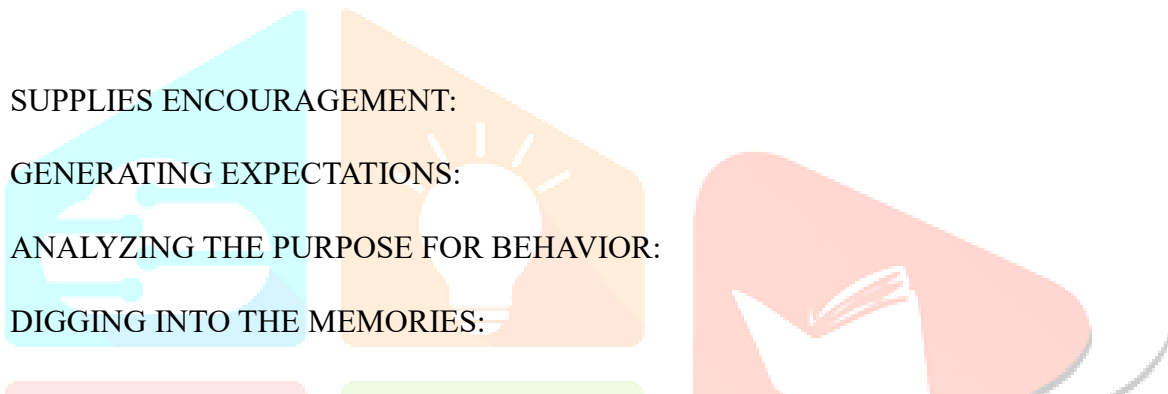
The term "Style of life" includes a person's goal, self-concept, feelings for others, and attitude towards the world. It is the outcome of the interaction of environment, heredity and a person's creative power. People with a socially useful style of life express their social interest through *action*. The three major problems of life that is *neighborly love, sexual love and occupation* can be solved through social interest.

## CREATIVE POWER:

Adler believed every person has an ability to create his or her own style of life which means all people are solely responsible for who they are and how they behave. Their *creative power* helps them to take control of their own lives and is responsible for their final goal, regulating their method of striving for their goal that accords to the development of their social interest.

## IMPORTANCE OF ADLERIAN THEORY:

Adlerian theory puts forth various methods which promotes an individual's resilience and growth. Some major techniques which are used in Adlerian therapy are cited below:

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- SUPPLIES ENCOURAGEMENT:
  - GENERATING EXPECTATIONS:
  - ANALYZING THE PURPOSE FOR BEHAVIOR:
  - DIGGING INTO THE MEMORIES:

## RAINBOW ROWELL:

Rainbow Rowell was born on February 24, 1973 at Nebraska, United States. She is known for her Young Adult, Contemporary fiction and New-adult fiction. Before starting her writing career, Rowell was a columnist and a copywriter from 1995 to 2012 at the Omaha World Herald. When she was working for an add agency, she wrote "*Attachments*" as a past time, which became her first published novel later.

In 2011, a contemporary romantic comedy was published, which deals about a company's IT boy who falls in love with a woman whose email he has been constantly monitoring. The novel has been listed as one of the outstanding debuts that year by Kirkus Reviews. In 2012, Rowell published her first young adult novel, *Eleanor and Park*. In 2013, she wrote *Fangirl*, which is her next young adult novel. Both *Eleanor and Park* and *Fangirl* were named by the New York Times as the best young adult fiction of the year. Later *Eleanor and park* received some negative attention from a parents' group at a Minnesota high school claiming it to be profane for which Rowell gave a clear-cut explanation.

In January 2014, Rowell signed a two- book deal with First Second, an American publisher of graphic novels. *Landline*, a contemporary adult novel, dealing about a marriage in trouble, was published on July 8, 2014, which is Rowell's fourth novel. After *Fangirl*, Rowell created a trilogy of books based on the fictional books from *Fangirl*. Its sequel came up in the year 2015, which is set as the eighth book in the series. It is notably influenced from the Harry Potter series by JK Rowling. Her recent novels, *Wayward Son* published in the year 2019 and her 2021 book *Any Way the Wind Blows* are also Simon Snow books.

Some of the major themes Rowell employs in her novels are family dynamics, facing lives obstacles, coming of age, love, identity crisis and teen angst. Rowell uses simple diction yet conveys strong social message to the readers. She brings in vivid descriptions before the readers through her vibrant use of literary devices like imagery and metaphors. She seems to have been greatly influenced by the magical world which is clearly seen in her novels.

In 2013, Rowell's young adult novels *Eleanor and Park* and *Fangirl* attained a great deal of critical acclaim. She has received many awards for *Eleanor and Park* namely the Odyssey award of honour in 2014, it was also selected by Amazon as one of the 10 best books of 2013 and also as Goodreads best young adult fiction of 2013. *Eleanor and Park*, has also been optioned for a screenplay.

#### *Fangirl:*

*Fangirl* is a Young Adult novel by Rainbow Rowell, published in the year 2013. The novel is about the protagonist, Cath, a socially awkward college freshman. She's an obsessive fan fiction writer and an ardent fan of a popular book series called, "Simon Snow" by Gemma T Leslie. Cath is struggling to adapt to college life and deal with her anxieties, especially since her twin sister Wren wants to explore a new independent life without her. Cath finds solace in her fan fiction writing and her online community. But when she becomes more involved in her writing and her relationships with her roommate, Reagan and her boyfriend, Levi, she begins to confront the challenges of, real life experiences. The novel explores the themes of family, identity, creativity and mental health as Cath steers her way through her first year of college and learns to balance her fandom with her own writing and personal growth. Through socialising with others, Cath finally begins to find her own voice and discovers her own story.

The novel revolves around identical twins, Cath and Wren. Though they are identical twins they have completely contrasting personalities. Wren appears to be more sociable and outgoing whereas Cath is the shy, bookish protagonist of the novel. Now that both are off to university, Wren decides to distance herself a little from Cath, because she wants to breathe some fresh air. On the other hand, Cath decides to stick with her normal routine, reading books and writing her favourite fan fiction, Simon Snow series. Cath, in fact, survives her crushing social anxiety by writing, and she also has a huge online fanbase for her fiction, Simon Snow Fantasy series.

Cath's dysfunctional family where her mother abandoned them when they were young because she wanted to be let loose from the familial commitments is the reason which Cath states for her introverted behaviour. During the due course of her university life, she decides to open her heart to new people and new experiences which makes her life a little better.

#### Hating Oneself is a Way of Shutting Out Others:

One of the key concepts of the Adlerian theory states that, "Hating oneself is a way of shutting out others, rather than actually warranted". This comes true with the central character, Cath. In chapter 4, when Cath's roommate Reagan enquires Cath about her ignorant behaviour on eating. Reagan asks Cath as why she survives eating protein bars instead of eating real food in the dining hall for which they pay bills. Cath replies that she doesn't know where the dining hall was. Reagan gets shell shocked with Cath's answer as it's been a couple of days since Cath joined her freshman year. Reagan invites her for dinner with her and asks her to put on her student ID. Cath simply denies her invite and says, "I'm not going to dinner with you. You don't even like me" (Cath, 40). Cath just imagines that Reagan doesn't like her mainly because of her weird nature and keeps ignoring her till date instead of trying to talk to her and figure things out.

Another incident comes in justification when Reagan asks Cath the reason for not confessing her feelings to Levi. Cath says, "I didn't want to like him back. I tried to be mean to him" (Cath, 190). This kind of reply shows Cath's insecurity which hinders her from revealing her love towards Levi.

When Reagan probes further, Cath says, "It was one thing when I had a crush on him and he was totally unattainable. But I don't think I could actually be with someone like Levi. It would be like interspecies dating" (Cath, 191).

Also, to Reagan certifying Levi to be a good human being, Cath responds back that he is not just like her and she does not deserve someone like Levi because there is nothing common between them. She adds that “I’m scared of everything. And I’m crazy.....Underneath this veneer of slightly crazy and socially inept, I’m a complete disaster” (Cath, 192).

Cath without consulting anything with Levi about his liking towards her, blindly comes to a conclusion. Cath doesn’t want anybody in her universe though she likes them. She shuts them out by hating herself.

Being ignored and rejected is the root cause for an individual to feel ashamed. Shame is built on the belief that he is fundamentally flawed. Dr. Claudia Black in her book, “Changing Course” writes, “To live with shame is to feel alienated and defeated, never quite good enough to belong. It is an isolating experience that makes us think we are completely alone and unique in our belief that we are unlovable. Secretly, we feel like we are to blame. Any and all deficiency lies within ourselves”. A child depends on his parents though they are abusive because he needs basic necessities to survive until he comes of age to earn his own penny.

#### A Competitive Mindset Destroys One’s Mental Health:

The next salient key aspect of the theory is, “A competitive mindset destroys one’s mental health”. As Cath is passionate about writing, apart from her fanfiction saga, she also joins a Fiction Writing course handled by Professor Piper. This is actually a massive milestone in her aspiration for writing because Piper usually doesn’t take any of the freshman students in her class. She is the first person to enter Piper’s class as a freshman. Piper admitted her in for her talent as Cath clearly had a flair for writing. Piper gives some writing assignments regularly to the class.

Cath joins hands with Nick, one of the students from her fiction writing class. They become writing partners. They often meet in the love library in the campus and work together. In the beginning it seems they have a healthy competition but as time progresses, tinges of ambitious mindset, is clearly visible in both of them. Professor Piper wanted the class to write a scene with an unreliable narrator. For this task, Cath wrote a story with Simon and Baz from the Simon Snow series by altering the storyline. Professor Piper on the day of distributing their corrected works didn’t return Cath’s assignment alone. Piper told Cath to wait for the class to



leave and meet her later. Cath thought this was a good sign that Piper must have really liked her story. Cath's cocksureness in fact turns out to be a catastrophe rather than a denouement as she expected. Piper graded her story with a red 'F'. Cath was appalled to see that marking. Piper gave an explanation stating that the characters and the whole world belongs to someone else. The author of *Simon Snow and the Mage's Heir*, Gemma T. Leslie owns them and not Cath. Cath was dumbstruck on hearing Piper's comments and blurted out, "But the story is mine" (Cath, 109). Piper retorted that, "If you're asked to write something original, you can't just steal someone else's story and rearrange the characters" (Piper, 109). Cath simply can't accept her defeat. Without realizing what Piper was trying to say, Cath was offended and rudely back-answered. This inability of Cath not being able to take her blunder in a positive light showcases her unhealthy competitive behaviour.



The traumatic experiences faced in childhood will have long lasting impact even after children grow into adults. Tamsyn Muir's lines in her book, "Harrow the Ninth, The Locked Tomb 2" can best illustrate this. "But when she was scared, she was a child again, and she was more afraid of being a child again than anything else in her life". Daniel Bernock elucidates the effects of trauma in her book, "Emerging With Wings: A True Story of Lies, Pain, And The LOVE that Heals" as, "Trauma is personal. It does not disappear if it is not validated. When it is ignored or invalidated the silent screams continue internally heard only by the one held captive".



It's Dangerous to Believe that One's Past Determines His Future:

The prime key point of the Adlerian theory that is, "It's dangerous to believe that one's past determines his future", can be witnessed throughout the novel in the lead character. Cath and Wren's mother, Laura left them when they were young as she was not ready to shoulder responsibilities. This incident shattered the family into pieces. A beautiful, loving family broke down. Obviously, as little girls they weren't able to digest the situation. They suffered because of their family dysfunction. Cath shared her traumatic experiences which Cath and Wren faced in school after this devastating incident when her dad pestered her to talk with her mother as she wishes to meet them on thanksgiving and get to know them better. "...Back when we needed her, she wouldn't even return our phone calls. When we started our periods, we had to google the details..... I don't need a mother now, thanks. I'm good" (Cath, 170).

A child being deprived of the primary caregiver's love and bond at a young age is a pathetic situation without an ounce of doubt but that doesn't mean the child has to isolate from the entire world. If Cath changes her perspective, she can completely transform into a sociable person because at many situations, the readers are able to see a jovial and fun-loving Cath. For instance, Cath goes to Levi's party with Reagan. For the first time ever in her life, she steps out of her shell to experience the real life instead of her fictional world. "She couldn't believe she was doing this. Boy. Party. Strangers. Beer. Strangers. Party. Boy. Eye contact" (200).

She in fact stays in her comfort zone without giving it a try for this whole time. She decides she is destined to be holding onto her bad past, family chaos, insecurity and complexities. With her mean behaviour, she restricted others entering into her realm. She clearly did it on purpose. In American History, she ended up hanging out with Julian and T.J., Kendra in fiction writing class and Katie with two others in political science. This made others to maintain a distance from her. She was not invited to parties or hang outs. She didn't develop a friendship which spread into her personal life. "Cath wasn't trying to make new friends here. In some cases, she was actively trying not to make friends" (148).

Moreover, what Cath does is mere escapism. She writes not just because she had a calling for writing but also because for some time she would live in her own world and people. The American Psychology Association states escaping from reality as, "a defensive reaction used as a way of avoiding problems and conflicts of everyday life with the use of fantasy" (reference). Similarly, Cath also writes to supplant from the reality for a while. "It felt good to be writing.....To get lost in the World of Mages and stay lost. To not hear any voices... This was why Cath wrote fic...." (98).

Adler believed that people create certain patterns of behaviour to protect themselves against public disgrace which are known as "safeguarding tendencies". People use this to prevent themselves from their escalated self-image and to continue their present lifestyle without any trouble. Adler further narrowed down three common safeguarding tendencies which people use. Those are excuses, aggression and withdrawal. Cath seems to exhibit both excuses and withdrawal. Excuses are one of the most common safeguarding tendencies. Excuses are expressed in two formats generally by people. They are "Yes, but" or "If only". Cath seems to express her excuse in the latter format, that is, "If only". Cath's excuse can be phrased as, "If only I did not have a mother like Laura" or "If only I did not have a problematic childhood" or "If only I did not have a chaotic family" etc...

“I would have been more outgoing” and so on. As Adler stated, Cath tries to maintain a sense of self-worth and makes people believe that she’s more superior than she really is.

When people start running away from difficulties, their personality development comes to a rest. This tendency is referred to as withdrawal by Adler. This can also be said as safeguarding through distance. In this safeguarding through withdrawal, Adler has categorized four modes. They are 1. Moving backward, 2. Standing still, 3. Hesitating and 4. Constructing obstacles. Among this, Cath follows the second category, standing still. By standing still, people back off from any responsibility and avoid themselves being termed as failure. It’s as simple as safeguarding themselves from any kind of failure and as a means of protecting their self-esteem. This can be spotted when Cath doesn’t turn in her final fiction writing assignment, even after Professor Piper giving her a second chance. It’s because she doesn’t want to give another try and end up with yet another failure like her previous writing assignment with an untrustworthy narrator.

Further clarification can be made by analysing Wren’s character along side Cath’s. Right after their joining in High school, their dad and Wren insisted Cath about her going to frat parties. But she ignored them by replying that she doesn’t like parties.

When their rooms were allocated in High school, Wren immediately developed contact with her roommate Courtney. On the first day at campus, they planned to hang out together. On the contrary, Cath was not interested in getting to know her roommate Reagan and avoids talking to her completely. There are just Hello’s and Bye’s in between them. Cath tolerates her only because she has to survive a few more months with her in their room.

Wren’s social Calendar was always crowded whereas Cath remained in her room even if there was not a single soul left in the entire Dorm. Right from the beginning, Wren had always been the social and friendly one. She was the one invited to all the birthday parties. Even in junior high school, inviting Wren meant that Cath would accompany her. They were more like a package deal.

Most importantly both their reactions about their mother leaving home, is to be noted. They both went to therapy sessions together. But both their reactions turn out to be entirely different. Wren acting out and Cath acting in. This means, unlike Wren, Cath takes everything to her heart of hearts. When their dad tells them that he has been in talking terms with their mother for quite some time, Wren takes it easily as she views things from their mother’s shoes and understands that she needed some fresh air. She appears to be more grounded to reality than

Cath who is sensitive. She realizes that there is no necessity to stick in a marriage if things didn't work out between both the partners. Both have the liberty to resume or quit based on their situation. Cath on the other hand, doesn't understand this reality and feels her mother's deeds are totally self-centred and calls her mother "evil". She questions at some point on, what kind of mother abandons her own children without any sense of guilt.

Hammen, Brennan and Shih, Family Discord and Stress Predictors of Depression and Other Disorders in Adolescent Children of Depressed and Nondepressed Women described a significant link between the functioning of family and the prevalence of depression in children with depressive mothers. Some studies show that the disadvantageous family structure are said to have more impact on child development than the parental depression itself.

#### Conclusion:

As John F. Kennedy states, "Change is the law of life. And those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future" (Address in the Assembly Hall at the Paulskirche in Frankfurt). One who keeps living in the past is eventually a loser at the end. It won't take him anywhere but will bring in only regrets and worries. There is a common notion that a child's present behavior like seclusion, being introverted has an influence from their past experiences or trauma caused in their childhood. It may be due to their dysfunctional families. But instead of playing this blame game on their parents, their surroundings or their economical condition, with some effort and will to change, an individual can eventually transform into a better person at any point or stage in their lives as the Adlerian theory suggests. To reap benefits, trying to change is essential rather than finding an excuse for their behavior and remaining backwards and stagnant throughout their lives.

One's uniqueness is what makes one special. A person's individuality and their life experiences, molds them into amazing beings. One's thoughts, perceptions, views are what makes an individual stand out from the crowd. This is one of the key aspects of Adlerian theory that is, personality is unified and self-consistent. An individual's thoughts and actions acts as a catalyst to achieve their goals.

All human activity is viewed from the lens of social interest. Humans are said to form an interpersonal connection with the society which is essential for their overall growth. Without the help of society, a person cannot achieve milestones. This can be seen when Cath's friends pushes her to complete her fanfiction. Not only her friends but even her readers words gave Cath a push to work on it even better and faster. If no one was there to acknowledge and appreciate her writing, she wouldn't have reached this far. Sometimes humans need a bit of encouragement from the ones around them. Another instance is when Cath's dad was admitted in hospital, Levi leaves behind his work and drives Cath to Omaha. He was a moral support for Cath in her hard times.

Altogether, if Wren can sail past her not so good old days, so can Cath, if she pushes herself a little harder. As the novel takes pace, this kind of happens. Cath seems to transform into a happier person as she becomes ready to open up her bottled feelings and emotions. She confesses her feelings to Levi. She no longer thinks she is not fit to be in a relationship with Levi. She is vulnerable when she is with him which is a positive sign. Reagan is more than a roommate now. She goes to the dining hall without any fear even if Reagan was not there. She accepts the fact that Wren has a life outside Cath and family. Cath doesn't bother about her mother much as she tries to accept the fact that her mother now has a new family to look after. As Rowell puts it, "...she's realizing that there's more to learn about love than she ever thought possible..." (*Fangirl*

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