

THE EPISTLE

Saint James' Episcopal Church
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September 2019

This Month's Cover

Our cover painting this month, in honor of the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross (September 14), is *Saint Helena* by Cima da Conegliano. Completed in about 1495, it is oil on a wood panel and is very small for a work of that era, measuring only about 16"x15". It is displayed in the Samuel H. Kress collection in the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. It depicts Saint Helena, the mother of the Roman emperor Constantine the Great, holding the True Cross on Mount Calvary outside the city walls of Jerusalem. Just behind her is the fig tree that Jesus cursed (Mk. 11:12ff).

Constantine was the first Roman emperor to legalize and defend Christianity, and he was baptized on his deathbed. His father, Constantius Chlorus, was a pagan Roman general in Britain who was tolerant of Christianity. His mother, Saint Helena, was Constantius' consort, and was a Greek Christian. After Constantine became emperor, he commissioned his mother in AD 326 to go to the Holy Land and identify the sacred places related to Jesus' life. Even though it was almost 300 years later, those sites would have been precious to the Christians in Palestine. Their locations would have been handed down from generation to generation, so there is likely considerable validity to the sites that she identified. She also allegedly found the True Cross, the cross on which Jesus was crucified. Again, it is entirely possible that soon after the Resurrection the early followers of Jesus retrieved the cross-piece of his cross and preserved it. The few fragments of it that survive today may well be actual fragments of the True Cross. One of them, embedded in crystal, is suspended over the high altar at the Cathedral of Saint John the Divine in New York City. The Feast of

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the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, also called Holy Cross Day, celebrates not only the finding of the Cross, but also Christ's triumph over sin and death through his sacrifice on the Cross.

Giovanni Battista Cima da Conegliano (c.1459-c.1517) was an Italian Renaissance painter who worked mainly in Venice. He is generally considered to be of the Venetian school, although his landscapes are strongly influenced by the Sicilian Antonello da Messina, who followed the Dutch school. Cima painted mainly religious subjects, although he also did a number of mythological ones. Most of his paintings were intended for homes rather than for churches, and therefore are quite small. He was born in Conegliano in the province of Treviso around 1459. His father was a cloth-shearer (*cimator*), thus his family's surname of Cima. We know almost nothing of his early training, but his earliest works are so close to the style of Bartolomeo Montagna that most critics believe he must have been his pupil. His later works show an influence from Giovanni Bellini, and his use of color indicates influence from the young Titian. He and Leonardo da Vinci were among the first Renaissance painters to have landscapes behind the main figures (as we see in the *Mona Lisa*), although Cima's were much more detailed. This kind of detailed landscape in portraits became standard in the 16th and 17th centuries. Cima died in Venice in about 1517, leaving his second wife and seven children.

Richard R. Losch+

A Word from the Editor

From the time I first heard it in 1960 I have loved the song "Try to Remember the Kind of September," and every September I am reminded of it again. It was the keynote song of the musical "The Fantasticks" (the longest-running off-Broadway musical in history). When it first came out I was in my mid-20s, "a tender and callow fellow," and had no idea what it would be like to grow old and live with lingering memories. Now that I'm in my mid-80s the last stanza makes a lot more sense than it did then: "Deep in December, it's nice to remember the fire of September that made us mellow." The one thing

in the song that long puzzled me is that at the end of each stanza it says, “Try to remember, and if you remember, then follow.” Follow what? Most of the song speaks of the blessings and gentle things in life, and only once does it mention pain: “Deep in December, it’s nice to remember, without a hurt the heart is hollow.” There is no such thing as a life with no pain, and when we have to deal with it we have two alternatives—confront it and let it strengthen us, or dwell on it and let it destroy us.

When I was a boy my grandfather told me, “Live right, because one of the most important things you will do for yourself in life is to make memories. You won’t understand that until you are older, but it is true.” I now understand what he meant. I have learned what I am to follow: that which is good, because that is what produces good memories, and good memories inspire good actions. I now know what to follow. I have not always succeeded in this—none of us do—but it is well worth striving for. To me the good things in life are the tokens of the providence of God, and that is why I try to remember and follow them. “Try to remember, and if you remember, then follow.”

“Without a hurt, he heart is hollow.” I follow Jesus Christ, who knew pain better than anyone else ever could. He confronted it and vanquished it, focusing on the positive. I believe that what the songwriter Tom Jones had in mind was to follow the good things in life and not to dwell on the things that can take control of us, such as materialism and pain. That is the secret not only to happiness in this life, but more importantly to spiritual success and eternal bliss in the next.

Father Rick Losch+

Evening Prayer and Supper in October

Although we usually have a service of Evening Prayer and a Parish Supper on the third Wednesday in September, the committee has recommended that we postpone it until October this year. Not only will that avoid the usual September hubbub, but the weather is much more peasant in October.

Richard R. Losch+

Good v. Evil

We tend to think of good and evil as being polar opposites, distinct from one to the other. Unfortunately, this is rarely the case. More often than not it is difficult to distinguish between good and evil. Take, for example, a moral dilemma that has been considered by philosophers and theologians for centuries: You see a man about to murder a small child. The only possible way you can save the child is to kill the man. What do you do? It is immoral to allow the child to die when you have the power to save him, yet it is also immoral to take another man's life.

A fascinating blend of good and evil is exemplified in the life of a man who had every bit as much influence on modern history as Henry Ford, yet whom most people have never heard of. That man is the German chemist Fritz Haber (1868-1934), who is responsible not only for saving millions of lives, but also for the deaths of millions. Around the turn of the 20th century Haber dedicated his research to finding a way to make a synthetic nitrate fertilizer in order to relieve worldwide famine. Plants need nitrates to grow, and without fertilizers the supply of nitrates in the soil is sparse and undependable. Up to that time the only nitrate fertilizers available were made from a mineral found mainly in Chile, and were therefore very expensive. Haber, in collaboration with Carl Bosch, discovered a way to combine nitrogen and hydrogen to form synthetic ammonia, which is the basic source of nitrate fertilizers. Because of the Haber-Bosch process cheap synthetic nitrates became readily available, and food crops across Europe began flourishing. The threat of famine was greatly diminished, and literally millions around the world were saved from starvation. In 1918 he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Chemistry for his discovery.

At that time nitrates were also essential for the production of almost all known explosives. When World War I broke out in 1914, Germany depended on Chilean minerals for most of their nitrates, including for gunpowder and artillery shells. Immediately after the outbreak of the war, Great Britain blockaded Chile, cutting off Germany's supply. Without another source, the war would have ended in less than a year. Haber's process,

however, with further developments by Haber himself, made synthetic nitrates readily available for armaments. While millions were saved from starvation by Haber's synthetic nitrates, millions also died on the battlefield because of them. Haber then went on to perpetrate an overt evil. He developed a series of poison gases to be used on the battlefield, bringing about thousands of horribly painful deaths and lifelong injuries. This earned him the epithet, The Father of Chemical Warfare.

A serious health threat in Haber's time was pest-borne diseases. He refined a very effective pesticide, saving countless lives from fatal diseases by controlling the vermin that carried them. It was called Zyklon-B. Less than ten years after Haber's death, Zyklon-B was the primary chemical used in the gas chambers of the Nazi death camps, and was responsible for murdering millions of Jews. Ironically, Haber was a Jew.

Playing "what-if" can be fruitless, but we wonder what might have happened if Haber had not become a chemist. It is possible that World War I would have been over by 1915. Hitler would not have been a battlefield hero, and would not have been gassed and spent a year in the hospital being bombarded by anti-Semitic and pro-Fascist propaganda. The opportunities for the rise of Nazism might never have presented themselves.

Good and evil are not separate extremes, but are blended throughout our lives. It would be easy if they were clearly delineated, but unfortunately they are not, so it is up to us to discern them and to respond appropriately. I do not believe that human intellect and reason alone are sufficient for this discernment. We need the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the teachings of the Church, and a God-given sensitivity to how important a decision can often be. Fritz Haber started out intending to do good, then chose to do evil. He did not live long enough to see one of his good intentions be twisted into one of the supreme evils of modern history. We must constantly be on the alert to see the possible consequences of our decisions, and pray for the courage, wisdom and moral strength to do what is right and good. It is not easy, but it is essential to our salvation.

Richard R. Losch+

Mary, Did You Know?

A 1984 pseudo-folk song called, “Mary, Did You Know?” asks if when Jesus was born Mary knew who he was and what he would accomplish. When I first heard the song, my immediate reaction was, “Of course she knew! It was made patently clear at the Annunciation” (Lk. 1:28ff). Mary is rightfully portrayed by the Church as the Perfect Woman, and is extolled as the Mother of God¹ and the Queen of Heaven, “full of grace.” How could she not have known?

As I have pondered this over the years, however, I have come to realize that perhaps one of the signs of her perfection is that while she knew what the angel Gabriel had told her, she may not have understood its full implications until after the Resurrection. She is, for example, the paragon of faith and obedience. Faith is easy when everything is absolutely clear about what you are putting your faith in. If you have no question and no fear, what virtue is there in faith? Faith is like courage. If you are not afraid to do something, then it takes no courage to do it. The brave man is not the one who has no fear (he is more likely a fool), but the one who is afraid and does what needs to be done in spite of his fear. If Mary did not fully understand and yet was willing to accept God’s will without question, then she had great faith. Likewise, it is easy to obey a command when you understand exactly what it is all about. Obedience is virtue when you are not clear why the command is given but are willing to obey simply because it is God’s will.

When Jesus was an infant he was brought to the Temple to be presented to God. It was there that Simeon and the aged prophetess Anna immediately recognized him as the promised Messiah and proclaimed him as such. “And the child’s father *and mother* were amazed at what was being said about him” (Lk. 2:33). If they fully understood who he was, why were they

¹ The phrase Mother of God is a translation of the Greek *Theotokos* (Θεοτοκος), “One who brings forth God.” It does not mean that God was created in her womb, but that the Son of God took upon himself humanity in her womb, and was brought forth into the world through her body.

amazed? Likewise, when Jesus was twelve Mary and Joseph took him to Jerusalem, where he astounded the rabbis at the Temple with his knowledge and understanding (Lk. 2:41 ff). He was separated from them, and when they found him, “His mother said to him, ‘Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety.’ He said to them, ‘Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?’ *But they did not understand what he said to them.* Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them.¹ His mother treasured all these things in her heart.”

That last sentence is of profound importance. Mary pondered all these experiences, and over time came more and more to understand. By the time Jesus began his ministry at the age of thirty there is no question that she had begun to realize his significance. It was at the wedding at Cana of Galilee that she called on him to help the bridegroom when the wine gave out (Jn. 2:1ff). She would not have done so if she did not believe that he had the ability to do something about it.

To say that Mary did not fully understand Jesus until after the Resurrection and Pentecost does not in any way denigrate her perfection or her role as the Queen of Saints. If anything, it enhances them. She raised him, loved him and supported him not as some kind of superhuman omniscient demi-goddess for whom it all came easily, but with the normal fears and questions that would be expected of the mother of the man whom she slowly came to realize is the Christ; and ultimately with the supreme pain of a mother at the foot of the cross on which her son hung. She is human, not divine, yet she was sinless. She is the Queen of Heaven and the *Theotokos*—the Mother of God. She is thus the paradigm of the perfection of faith and obedience that serves as an example and inspiration to us all.

Richard R. Losch+

¹ This is an important phrase. Joseph was not Jesus’ biological father, but in ancient Judaic thinking fatherhood depended on a bond of paternal care and filial obedience. If that father-child relationship was strong, the child was considered the blood descendant of the father regardless of biology.

Be Wordly Wise

Defending the Language

It has nothing to do with theology, but one thing that makes a grammarian cringe is the all too common misuse of the words less and fewer. There is a simple rule to tell which should be used. If something can be counted, then fewer should be used, while if it cannot be counted, then less is correct. For example, fewer plastic bottles will clutter the environment if less bottled water is consumed. Less advertising causes fewer sales. I shudder when I go to the grocery store and see “Ten items or less,” when it should be “Ten items or fewer.” This may seem nit-picky, but if we do not struggle to defend correct usage, our language will be weakened. English is one of the most influential languages on earth because it is one of the richest. Its enormous vocabulary and wide variety of grammatical constructs enable us to express ideas with great precision. It is true that language evolves over time, as it should. It must do so, because if it does not it will stagnate and die. A dead language is one that has ceased to develop. Notwithstanding, as it evolves we must try to maintain correctness in order to keep our language from becoming sloppy and imprecise.

Richard R. Losch+

Be Nice, Be Nice, and Be Concise

Dr. Seuss's *The Cat in the Hat* contains only 225 different words. When he submitted it in 1957 his publisher, Random House's founder Bennet Cerf, bet him \$50 that he could not write a book using 50 words or fewer. In 1960 he published *Green Eggs and Ham*, which uses exactly 50 different words. Reportedly, Cerf never paid off the bet.

Richard R. Losch+

*When you lose one of your senses another is enhanced.
This is why people who have no sense of humor have
such a heightened sense of self-importance.*

The Innocence of Eve

This may seem a strange headline when we consider that Eve is blamed for the fall of Adam, and thus for mankind's fall through which sin came into the world. Even though most Biblical scholars take this story as allegory rather than as literal history, it nonetheless tells great truths about the sin of mankind. If we read the Genesis account carefully, however, it becomes clear that many of the false myths that have grown out of it are just that—false myths. Nowhere in the Genesis story does it impute any sin to Eve for what she did, other than simple disobedience of a divine command that was not actually given to her, but to Adam. The Bible never even says that he told her about it, although that can be inferred from her conversation with the serpent. It is also assumed that the serpent was Satan or his agent, although that again is never said in Genesis. It is difficult for us to read the story totally objectively, because we have been so inculcated with these myths. If we do, what we find is Eve making a rational decision based on the serpent's arguments. She then tastes the fruit, and immediately gives it to Adam, who is obviously present and aware of her conversation with the serpent. She does not entice or coax him. He makes no argument, and immediately also eats of it.

Again, despite long-standing traditions, the Bible implies nothing sexual about this episode. Sex properly used is not sinful, but is a part of God's basic plan: "Be fruitful and multiply" (Gen. 1:28); "They shall become one flesh" (2:24). In many Renaissance depictions of the Fall, however, either Adam or Eve is portrayed making "the fig" (*la fica*), a vulgar medieval hand gesture symbolizing a vagina, implying that the first sin had to do with seductive sex.¹ This is also often associated with the non-biblical (and incorrect) idea not only that sex is sinful *per se*, but also that Eve was a seductress.

¹ Man's natural tendency to sin, called Original Sin or the Sin of Our Origin, is incorrectly in many people's minds associated with the fact that we are sexually conceived. The term refers to the stain of sin on all mankind from the first (the original) sin, not to our sexual origin.

Where, then, did these incorrect ideas come from? Although they had probably been brewing in many people's minds for generations, their first known literary source was in a collection of writings from about 100 BC to about AD 100 called the Pseudepigrapha. These are books that were falsely attributed to Adam, Moses, Enoch, Ezra, Jeremiah, Solomon and several others, and contain many deceptive and often highly imaginative stories and misinterpretations of Scripture.¹ For example, the *Apocalypse of Moses* has Adam reviling Eve as an "evil woman" who brought destruction to them both. Eve's sin is described as a "sin of the flesh" (a sexual sin). In Genesis 6:1-2 there is a reference to the Nephilim, a race of giants about whom the Bible says nothing negative. In the Pseudepigraphic First Book of Enoch, however, six chapters are devoted to those two verses, claiming sexual depravity of earthly women in seducing angels, all because of Eve's depravity. In return for sex, the angels teach the women "every kind of sin," including corruption, adultery, incest, oppression, alchemy, astrology, warfare and sorcery. According to Enoch, women are responsible for all earthly sin. The Bible says no such thing.

The name Pseudepigrapha is Greek for "falsely attributed writings." When scholars were considering what books to canonize both for the Hebrew Bible and for the New Testament, these books were rejected out-of-hand. Unfortunately, however, many of them were widespread at the time, and their false doctrines became securely rooted in the popular culture. One of those doctrines, for which many women around the world are still paying a price, is that Eve was an evil seductress who lured the innocent Adam to disobey God. In 1487 a book called *Malleus Maleficarum* ("The Hammer of Witches"²) was published, bearing many such false ideas from the Pseudepigrapha.

¹ In that sense they are like the Gnostic Gospels of the 4th century AD, most of which were blatantly heretical, and some of which contained outlandish stories about the childhood and teachings of Jesus. It was a Gnostic Gospel that proposed that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene.

² *Malificarum* is the genitive plural of the feminine word *malifica*, female evildoer, thus witch.

It was an extremely thorough and detailed work about witchcraft, and launched a barbaric persecution of alleged witches throughout Europe. It argued that since witches were women, their evil ways were brought about by the sin of Eve. It claims, “For though the devil tempted Eve to sin, yet Eve seduced Adam. And as the sin of Eve would not have brought death to our soul and body unless the sin had afterwards passed on to Adam, to which he was tempted by Eve, not by the devil, therefore she is more bitter than death.”

This followed the Pseudepigraphic view that women are evil and are thus inferior to men. Interestingly enough, although many of the Pseudepigrapha were written by Jews, the Jews were less oppressive of women than most of the other Middle Eastern peoples, and in some respects they granted them equality.¹ In the Jewish home, the woman had a great deal of authority. This is reflected in modern Israel, where women are legally absolutely equal to men in all rights and responsibilities.

If we read the Genesis story as it is written, without the baggage of later corruption and misinterpretation, we can see that Eve was more the victim than the perpetrator of evil, and that Adam was wholly complicit in her actions and not at all her victim. We can also see that sex had nothing whatsoever to do with the Fall. Eve’s sin was the sin of pride—she wanted to be like God (Gen. 3:4ff)—and because of this we can see that ultimately pride is the root of all sin. She was gullible enough to believe the serpent’s “spin,” but Adam was also every bit as guilty as she because he stood right there and did nothing to stop her. It is probably going a bit too far to refer to the innocence of Eve, but it is going way too far to blame her for all the sins and woes of mankind. The blame for that falls squarely on the shoulders of every one of us, male and female alike.

Richard R. Losch+

¹ It was not difficult for the earliest Christians, most of whom were Jews, to accept Paul’s teaching that all, including women, are equal in Christ (Gal. 3:28). In fact, it would have been harder for a Roman or a Greek than for a Jew. The other Middle Eastern cultures of the time were extremely oppressive of women, as is still the case in many Islamic countries today.

Children in the Ancient Middle East

It is difficult to learn much about the life of children in the ancient Middle East because so little was written about them, including in the Bible, and we have no significant examples of children's writings. What we have was written by adults, and therefore we see them only from the adult perspective. In most cases we cannot even be sure what artifacts were associated specifically with children. The only clues we have of these are from artifacts buried with them, and these are rare.

For over 3000 years in the Middle East (roughly 3600 to 500 BC) it was common to bury infants in jars under the floor or in the walls of the house, while toddlers and older children were buried in the same manner as adults. Infant mortality was extremely high, with 35% dying in their first year, and 50% before their fifth birthday. Generally the only artifacts buried with infants were small ceramic vials, probably containing milk to sustain them in the afterlife. Occasional bits of jewelry or other personal items were buried with children, but most often there were no artifacts in their graves, including toys.

Even in the case of toys it is often not clear for the most part what toys were specifically children's and what were used by adults. There were many adult toys (means of entertainment), among which the most popular were board games of all sorts. There are many examples, particularly in the Mesopotamian regions, of child-sized weapons such as bows and arrows, spears, slingshots, boomerangs and throw-sticks, but it is likely that these were used for training rather than as toys. There have also been found spinning tops, hoops, and rattles, and these were probably specifically children's toys. Dolls have been found, but very rarely in children's graves. We know that some dolls were used as fertility symbols, and it is likely that some were used for magic, but there is little evidence that girls played with them as they do today. Another artifact has been found that may have been either a toy or possibly a signaling device. It is a clay disc with holes in it that was tied to a cord. When swung around fast it makes a buzzing sound. It does not appear, however, that there was a wide variety of children's

toys available. For the most part children probably made do with whatever regular artifacts they could find to use as toys. There is not much evidence that ancient children in the Middle East (or anywhere else, for that matter) had much time to play with toys. Most of their time was spent working or in military training for boys and homemaking training for girls. For upper-class children there was training in the responsibilities they would have once they assumed positions of authority as adults.

In most ancient cultures only a small handful of the elite were literate, but most of the people were well-versed in the religion, traditions and history of their people. Story-telling was basic, and it is likely that a significant part of children's time was spent in listening to and later learning to tell stories. Although the "three Rs" were rarely part of their education, learning about their traditions was. The Jews were something of an exception to this in that literacy was much more common among them than among most ancient peoples, especially after the Exile (6th century BC). Study of the Torah was very important to them, and to do so one had to be literate. Through study of the Torah they also learned the religion, traditions and history of the Israelites. To this day education is one of the strongest cultural values of both religious and secular Jews.

One of the horrors of the ancient Middle East was the prevalence of human child sacrifice. While the Jews considered this an abomination, it was all too common among their neighbors. Infants and young children were sacrificed to ensure fertility of crops and of humans (apparently killing children in order to ensure having children was an irony that escaped them). One of the worst was the Canaanite god Moloch, who demanded regular child sacrifice by having the children thrown alive into a fire. This was one of the Israelites' primary justifications for the conquest and destruction of Canaan. One of the main locations for these sacrifices was the Valley of Hinnom that runs past what is now the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. The Bible calls it Gehenna, and to this day it is a symbol of Hell. In Jesus' day it was the city dump where trash and animal dung from the streets of the city were thrown. It was deemed an accursed

place. It was a stinking, constantly smoldering pit “where the worm never dies and the fire is never quenched” (Mk. 9:48).

While we say that the Israelites were horrified by child sacrifice, we are reminded that Abraham was commanded by God to sacrifice his young son Isaac (Gen. 22:1ff). In Abraham’s day the land was populated by Canaanites, so child sacrifices were widespread. God’s command to Abraham must have totally blindsided him, as it was so inconsistent with the God that he knew. Notwithstanding, he obeyed. It is important to understand that God had no intention of letting him go through with it. He did not do it to test Abraham’s faith. God knew that he would obey him. However, Abraham needed to find out his own strength. If he could bring himself to do that for God, his obedience was total. This was done as a proof to Abraham of his faith and obedience, not as a test of it.

Another story of child sacrifice is that of Jephthah’s sacrifice of his daughter in order to fulfill his vow to God (Jdg. 11:30ff). This sounds barbaric, but for thousands of years scholars have questioned whether he ever actually killed her. The Bible says that he “did with her according to the vow he had made. She had never slept with a man” (11:39). The interpretation is that he did not physically sacrifice her, but kept her from marrying and thus from ever continuing his bloodline. To the ancient Jews a woman’s barrenness was equivalent to death.

In the ancient world a child’s lot was often not a particularly happy one. For the most part children were treated like miniature adults without the rights and privileges afforded to adults. This outlook carried on right through the Middle Ages and even into relatively modern times, as we can see from the horrible child labor abuses even into the early 20th century. This was true also among the upper classes, and was particularly evident in the 19th and early 20th century British “public” (which meant private) school system, which was in many respects brutal. Most of us today remember at least to some degree a childhood of innocence, happiness and security. This is a blessing that few children in history have known.

Richard R. Losch+

A Touch of Trivia

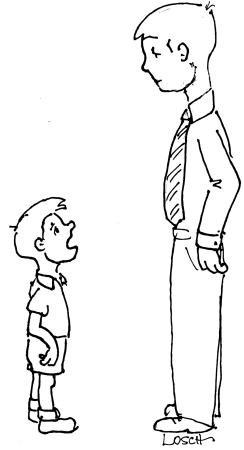
In 2007 U.S. Dist. Judge James Muirhead (NH) received a boiled egg from inmate C. J. Wolff protesting the prison diet. The judge ordered it destroyed and wrote Wolff,

“I do not like eggs in my file,
I do not like them any style.
I will not take them fried or boiled.
I will not take them poached or
broiled.
I will not take them soft or scrambled,
Despite your argument well-rambled.
No fan I am of the egg at hand.
Destroy that egg! Today! Today!
Today I say! Without delay!”

Richard R. Losch+

JAMIE

by Richard R. Losch



*“I started school today, but
they didn't finish the job.
They expect me to go back
again tomorrow!”*



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