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Grace dropped the phone. Harrison let the frosting knife slip out of his fingers..Because he hadn't heard Victoria Bressler speak in so long-and then only on two occasions-and because the woman on the phone had spoken so softly, Junior couldn't tell whether or not their voices were one and the same..Over the following hour, as Walter Panglo guided Jacob through the planning of the funeral, Jacob recounted the gruesome details of numerous airliner crashes, shipwrecks, train collisions, coal-mine disasters, darn collapses, hotel fires, nightclub fires, pipeline and oil-well explosions, munitions--plant explosions.....Raise high the candlestick. In spite of the masking music, breathe shallowly and through the mouth. Remain poised, ready.. "Oh, that's me, all right. I'm on the FBI's most-wanted list for criminal pie jostling." It's been a joy to me to go back to Earthsea and find it still there, entirely familiar, and yet changed and still changing. What I thought was going to happen isn't what's happening, people aren't who-or what-I thought they were, and I lose my way on islands I thought I knew by heart.. "Well, anyway," she said, as though Muffins uncharacteristic viciousness had been adequately explained, "this mending ought to cover ten more lessons." Evidently, her face was knotted with the effort to remember what the child had looked like, for the physician said, "Yes? What's wrong?" The only bad moment in the evening came when the pianist played "Someone to Watch over Me." She got up from the chair, went to the window, and raised the venetian blind rather than look out between its slats..When his stomach rolled uneasily and his scalp prickled, he was seized by panic, certain that he was going to suffer both violent nervous emesis and severe hives, breaking out and chucking up at the same time. He popped the capsules into his mouth but couldn't produce enough saliva to swallow them, so he turned on the faucet, filled his cupped hands with water, and drank, dribbling down the front of his jacket and sweater..Being uniquely sensitive, he had mourned Naomi with his entire body, with violent emesis and pharyngeal bleeding and incontinence. His grief had been so racking that it might have killed him. Enough was enough..Phimie's speech had been slurred later, as well, immediately following the birth of the baby, when she had struggled to convey her desire to name her daughter Angel..Heart racing, but reminding himself that strength and wisdom arose from a calm mind, Junior stood in the center of the small kitchen, slowly turning to study every angle of the room..Livor mortis had already set in, blood draining to the lowest points of her body, leaving the fronts of her bare legs, one side of each bare arm, and her face ghastly pale..Barty's reading and writing skills appeared to be related to his talent for math, as well. To him, language was first phonics, a sort of music that symbolized objects and ideas, and this music was then translated into written "syllables using the alphabet-which he saw as a system of math employing twenty-six digits instead of ten..Agnes was only thirty-nine years old, full of plans and vigor, so Angel's words seemed premature. Yet in too few years, she would have reason to wonder if perhaps these gifted children foresaw, unconsciously, that she would need the comfort of having witnessed this climb..Of course, Angel might have been playing around with the talking book. Or, even though she'd left the dolls downstairs, she might have been filling the time until Barty's return by having a nice chat with Miss Pixie and Miss Velveeta. She had other voices, too, for other dolls, and one for a sock puppet named Smelly.. "That was five years ago. After more surgeries than I care to remember, I was left with these." He raised his goblin hands again. "There's pain in humid weather, less when it's dry. I can take care of myself, but I'll never be a card mechanic again ... or a magician." ice bags. I almost laughed at his tendency to morbidness and self dramatization. The living dead had not come to get him: just some rubber ice bags..Barty paced off the downstairs hallway to the kitchen, thinking about Dr. Jekyll and the hideous Mr. Hyde..Recuperating, he had plenty of time to practice meditation. He became so proficient at focusing on the imaginary bowling pin that he could make himself oblivious of all else. A stridently ringing phone wouldn't penetrate his trance. Even Bob Chicane, Junior's instructor, who knew all the tricks, could not make his voice heard when Junior was at one with the pin..Junior suspected that no one other than this man's mother called him Tom. He was probably "Detective" to some and "Vanadium" to most who knew him..Focus. Get Ichabod all the way inside. Act now, think later. No, no, proper focus requires an understanding of the need to: scrutinize, analyze, and prioritize. Get the bitch, get the bitch! Slow deep breaths. Channel the beautiful rage. A fully evolved man is self-controlled and calm. Move, move, move! "You'd never cheat me. I know you. We'd have Christmas twice a year and parties for half birthdays." He found himself looking over his shoulder more than once. By the time he returned to his room, he felt half crushed by anxiety..Prepared for any contingency, Junior listened to the house until he was certain that he needed the knife for no one else..Chicane wasn't alone. Sparky Vox, the building superintendent, approached behind him and hovered. Seventy-two yet as spry as a monkey, Sparky didn't walk so much as scamper like a capuchin..Symptoms of food poisoning usually appear within two hours of dining. The hideous intestinal spasms had rocked him at least six hours after he'd eaten. Besides, if the culprit were food poisoning, he would have vomited; but he hadn't felt any urge to spew..Each page comprised four columns of names and numbers, most with addresses. Approximately one hundred names filled each column, four hundred to a page..In the top drawer, in addition to the expected items, Tom Vanadium found a gallery brochure for an art exhibition. In the hooded flashlight beam, the name Celestina White seemed to flare off the glossy paper as though printed in reflective ink..A sudden strange weakness, a formless dread, dropped Agnes out of her crouch and onto her knees beside the boy..Still looming over her, he snatched the pad out of her hands and examined the sketch. "Where would you have seen this?" IMplode To burst inward under pressure. Like the hull of a submarine at too great a depth..At the head of the line, Paul waved a red handkerchief out of the window of the station wagon.. "I can talk to you," he said to Salk. "You'll understand. She was hero, the only one I ever knew till I met you. I've read about them all my life, in pulp magazines and paperbacks. But Perri ... she was the real thing. She didn't save tens of thousands-hundreds of thousands of children like you've

done, didn't change the world as you've changed it, but she faced every day without complaint, and she lived for others. Not through them. For them. People called her to share their problem, and she listened and cared, and they called her with their good news because she took such joy in it. They asked for her advice, and though she was inexperienced, really, so short of experience in so many ways, she always knew what to say, Dr. Salk. Always the right thing. She had great heart and natural wisdom, and she cared so much." She devoted half her work time to the neighbors-in-need route that Agnes had established and steadily expanded, the other half to her painting. She was in no rush to mount a new show; anyway, she didn't dare renew contact with the Greenbaum Gallery or with anyone at all from her past life, until the police found Enoch Cain..Kitchen to dining room, dining room to hallway, keeping his back to the wall, easing quickly along, then into the foyer. Wait here, listening..Leaving the children under the tree, Tom returned to the house to phone the police..He knew what she made of it, all right, and he could see that the others on the porch knew as well, and likewise he could see that all of them wanted to hear him confirm the conclusion at which Agnes had arrived long before he'd come here with Wally this evening. Even in the dining room, before the proof in the rain, Tom had recognized the special bond between the blind boy and this buoyant little girl. In fact, he couldn't have arrived at any conclusion different from the one Agnes reached, because like her, he believed that the events of every day revealed mysterious design if you were willing to see it, that every life had profound purpose..Celestina sensed an easy camaraderie between these two men, but also tension that was perhaps related to the reference to an illegal search..For a moment, Junior drew a blank on Renee. Reluctantly, he trolled the past and fished up the painful memory: the gorgeous transvestite in the Chanel suit, heir or heiress to an industrial-valve fortune..He picked up Angel, picked up Barty. "Hold on." He carried them out of the room, down the stairs, out of the house, to the yard under the great tree, where they would wait for the police, and where they would not see Jacob's body when the coroner removed it by way of the front door..The Church nourished the soul, while the occult nourished the imagination. In Mexico, where physical comforts were often few and hope of a better life in this world was hard won, both the soul and the imagination must be fed if life was to be livable..Lowering his surgical mask, Dr. Lipscomb approached Celestina, where she stood with her back pressed to the wall..He needed to keep moving, conduct the search, find the watch, and get the hell out of here, but he couldn't stop staring at the musician. Something about the cadaver made him nervous-aside from the fact that it was dead and disgusting and, if he was caught with it, a one-way ticket to the gas chamber..Books were stacked high on a nearby table, favorite novels and volumes of verse, all of which Agnes had read before. With time so limited, she preferred the comfort of the familiar to the possibility that new writers and new stories would fail to please. Paul read to her often, as did Angel. Tom Vanadium sat with her, too, as did Celestina and Grace..Wishing he had left the gauze wrappings on his face, but afraid that the airwaves might already be carrying news of the bandaged man who had killed a minister in Spruce Hills, Junior abandoned the Dodge and hurriedly walked back to the private-service terminal, where the pilot from Sacramento waited. At the sight of his passenger, the pilot blanched and said, Allergic reaction to WHAT? And Junior said, Camellias, because Sacramento was the Camellia Capital of the World, and all that he wanted was to get back there, where he'd left his new Ford van and his Sklents and his Zedd collection and everything he needed to live in the future. The pilot couldn't conceal his intense revulsion, and Junior knew that he would have been stranded if he hadn't paid the round-trip charter fare in advance..Rising, Celestina said to Tom, "Last Tuesday night, we had to switch on the lawn sprinklers. This will be much better."..For a moment, Junior was mystified. Vanadium's movements had the quality of ritual, vaguely reminiscent of a priest raising high the Eucharist..Edom's twin, Jacob, who had never held a job, lived in the second apartment. He'd been there since graduating from high school.. "So where he threw the quarter," Barty said, as Angel listened intently and nodded her head, "wasn't really into Gunsmoke, 'cause that's not a place, it's just a show. See, maybe he threw it into a place where I'm not blind, or into a place where he doesn't have that messed-up face, or a place where for some reason you never came here today. There's more places than anybody could ever count, even me, and I can count pretty good. That's what you feel, right-all the ways things are?"..Pecan cakes, cinnamon custard pies boxed in insulated coolers, gifts wrapped with bright paper and glittery ribbons. Agnes Lampion made deliveries to those friends who were on her list of the needful, but also to friends who were blessed with plenty. The sight of each beloved face, each embrace, each kiss, each smile, each cheerfully spoken "Merry Christmas" at every stop fortified her heart for the sad task awaiting her when all gifts were given..His daughter, his affliction, his millstone, granddaughter of the boil-giving voodoo BaptistWhen he pushed Naomi, profit was the motive. He killed Victoria and Vanadium in self-defense. Those three deaths were necessary..He'd listened to the message and thought it incomprehensible, of no import. Suddenly, tardy intuition told him that it could not have been any more important to him if it had been dead Naomi calling from beyond the grave to leave testimony for the detective..Barty, didn't watch much television. He'd been up late enough to see Red Skelton only a few times, but that comedian always drew gales of laughter from him..When together in Agnes's company, Edom and Jacob were brothers, comfortable with each other. But together, just the two, no Agnes, they were more awkward than strangers, because strangers had no shared history to overcome..In a swirl of London Fog and righteous indignation, Neddy turned his back on Junior and drifted away through the nibbling, nattering crowd..After she flushed, Angel stood on a stepstool and washed her hands at the sink..Cypresses lined the entry drive to the cemetery. Tall and solemn, the trees kept guard, as though posted to prevent restless spirits from roaming out into the land of the living..On October 15, Junior acquired a third Sklent painting: The Heart Is Home to Worms and Beetles, Ever Squirming, Ever Swarming, Version 3..After coffee had been served, when Celestina and Wally were no longer the center of attention, he indicated the array of desserts with his fork, smiled, and said, "I just want you to know, Celie, that these are sweets enough until we're married."..Agnes, who inherited the property,

would have welcomed her brothers in the main house. Although both were willing to visit her for an occasional dinner or to sit in rocking chairs on the porch, on a summer night, neither could abide living in that ominous place. Two things about him were remarkable, beginning with his face. His head was wrapped with white gauze bandages, so he looked like Claude Rains in *The Invisible Man* or like Humphrey Bogart in that movie about the escaped convict who has plastic surgery to foil the police and to start a new life with Lauren Bacall. Blond hair sprouted from the top of the elaborate wrappings. Otherwise, only his eyes, his nostrils, and his lips were uncovered. The ninth card was a jack of spades. Maria called it a knave of and at the sight of it, her bright smile dimmed. As Sinatra began to sing "I'll Be Seeing You," Junior stepped around the bloom and the Merlot. He cautiously peeled back two inches of the curtain at one of the sidelights. He raised one hand to halt the genteel debate. "The whole reason I stopped here first, before taking you folks on to my place, is so I wouldn't have to bring your suitcases back after Agnes won you over. This is where you'll be happiest, though you're always welcome if she tries to work you to death." Neddy talked when Celestina paused for breath, talked over her when she didn't pause, heard only his own mellifluous voice and was pleased to conduct both sides of the conversation, wearing her down as surely as though far more rapidly than the sand-filled winds of Egypt diminished the pharaohs' pyramids. He talked through the first polite "Excuse me" of the tall man who stepped into the open doorway behind him, through the second and third, and then with an abruptness that was as miraculous as any cure at the shrine of Lourdes, he fell silent when the visitor put a hand on his shoulder, eased him gently aside, and entered the apartment. Through the remainder of his dinner, he was entirely future focused, the past put safely out of mind. Until Of course, he had the Pinchbeck and Gammoner identities waiting, two escape hatches. But he didn't want to use them. He liked his life on Russian Hill, and he was loath to leave it. "I'm a healer, not a prosecutor. I'm not in the habit of making accusations, especially not against my own patients." He did not answer Hound's question. "The pepper tree had been whispering in the breeze, the roses nodding their bright heads. Now a stillness came into the cemetery, as if rising from beneath the grass, from out of that city of the lost. Wednesday, with a swiftness that confirmed its eagerness to make a deal, the state supplied records on the fire tower. For five years, a significant portion of the maintenance funds had been diverted by bureaucrats to other uses. And for three years, the responsible maintenance supervisor filed an annual report on this specific tower, requesting immediate funds for fundamental reconstruction; the third of these documents, submitted eleven months prior to Naomi's fall, was composed in crisis language and stamped urgent. Spruce Hills, but also those in the entire county, maybe seventy or eighty thousand. Alone, Junior sat in the breakfast nook with a pot of coffee and an entire Sara Lee chocolate fudge cake. "My little girl," she said, and belatedly she realized that this might not be a policeman, after all, but someone trying to determine if she and Angel were alone in the apartment. Odder yet, the pianist had studied him with a keen interest that was inexplicable, since they were essentially strangers. When caught staring, he'd appeared rattled, turning away quickly, eager to avoid further contact. Tom proceeded, "is that an infinite number of realities exist, other worlds parallel to ours, which we can't see. For example ... worlds in which, because of the specific decisions and actions of certain people on both sides, Germany won the last great war. And other worlds in which the Union lost the Civil War. And worlds in which a nuclear war has already been fought between the U.S. and Soviets." Kaitlin had the piercing voice and talent for vituperation that marked her as a member of the Hackachak tribe, but for now she was content to leave the vocal assault to her parents. The stare with which she drilled Junior, however, if brought to bear on a promising geological formation, would core the earth and strike oil in minutes. "I'm sure you would be, yes, but I'm afraid I don't have the patience to teach, I'm a performer, not an instructor. I suppose I could give you the name of a good teacher." If he had been any other three-year-old, she would have told a compassionate lie. He was her miracle child, however, her prodigy, and he would know a lie for what it was. Shivering, Junior slammed the trunk lid and warily surveyed the lonely landscape. Black pines spread bristled arms through the chary night, and the moon cast down a jaundiced light that seemed to obscure more than it illuminated. Kennedy, whose portraits hung side by side, the girl revealed to their mom and dad what had been done to her and also what, in her despair, excited, shrieking. Branch to branch, the flapping of wings is leathery, demonic. The only other sounds are the thud. CLOUDS SWARMED THE late-afternoon sun, and the Oregon sky grew sapphire where still revealed. Cops gathered like bright-eyed crows in the lengthening shadow of the fire tower. His inner turmoil boiled ever more fiercely, and the external evidence of it grew more obvious. In the cool air of the fading afternoon, he perspired as profusely as a man already being strapped into an electric chair; it streamed, gushed. He shook, shook, and he was half convinced that he could hear his bones rattling together like the shells of hard-boiled eggs in a rolling cook pot. Neither of them was aware that their personal drama, in all its clumsiness and glory, had focused the attention of everyone in the restaurant. The cheer that went up at Celestina's acceptance of his proposal caused her to start, knocking the ring from Wally's hand as he attempted to slip it on her finger. The ring bounced across the table, they both grabbed for it, Wally made the catch, and this time she was properly betrothed, to wild applause and laughter. This time, however, the singing lasted longer than before, long enough for him to become suspicious of the heating ducts. These rooms had ten-foot ceilings, and the ducts opened high in the walls. In the six weeks since conception, she must have missed at least one menstrual period. She hadn't complained of morning sickness, but surely she'd experienced it. It was highly unlikely that she'd been unaware of her condition. With the successful consumption of the burger and with the addition of the third Sklent to his collection, Junior felt more upbeat than he'd been in quite a while. Contributing to his better mood was the fact that he hadn't heard the phantom singer in longer than three months, since the library in July. Junior suspected Magusson never had any client but himself. Fat fees motivated him, not justice. Confused, Panglo held out his right hand, but Jacob said, "Sorry, no offense, but I don't shake with anyone." Then by ambulance to the hospital, whisked into surgery, and for a while,

blessed unconsciousness.. "I wasn't drinking," he said. "That's proven. But I admit being reckless, driving too fast in the rain. They cited me for that, for running the light." "I find you more than adequate in all ways that count. Besides, Joey was a generous and good lover. What he taught me, I can share." She smiled. "You'll find that I'm a darn good teacher, and I sense in you a star pupil." Even Angel, mere wisp of a cherubim, couldn't squeeze through a seven-inch opening.. He slid his chair sideways to the secretary and leaned forward with the gun in both hands.. As Celestina and her mother loaded the last of the pies into the ice chests in the Suburban, Paul and Agnes came back from her station wagon at the head of the caravan.. "You're the one who said your cold's just here. Maybe it stays in the kitchen, hoping it'll get a piece of pie." "Sometimes she wrote little paragraphs to God, very touching and humble notes of gratitude, thanking Him for bringing you into her life." By the time they reached the seventh painting, alcohol and rich French cuisine and Jack Lientery's powerful art combined to devastate Frieda. She shuddered, leaned with one hand on a canvas, hung her head, and committed an act of bad PR.. He had taken refuge in meditation, because he'd been frustrated by his continuing failure in the Bartholomew hunt and disturbed by his apparently paranormal experiences with quarters and with phone calls from the dead. More deeply disturbed than he had realized or had been able to admit.. "We'll need to talk about this a lot in the days to come, as we both have more time to think about it." At home, after phoning her folks, Celestina made a ham sandwich. She ate a quarter of it. Then two bites of a chocolate croissant. One spoonful of butter pecan ice cream. Everything was without taste, more bland than Phimie's hospital food, and it cloyed in her throat.. "Because of a certain awareness you've had since childhood," Celestina said, recalling what he'd told her in San Francisco.. After a little silence Otter said, "Thanks." And he looked up at Hound, one brief, questioning, judging glance.. To Nolly, Kathleen said, "This is why I married you. To be around talk like this." Junior was pleasantly surprised by his flexibility and by his audacity. He was, indeed, a new man, a daring adventurer, and by the day he grew more formidable.. Easter still lay a few weeks away, but already Celestina had begun decorating more than a hundred baskets, so that nothing would need to be done at the last minute except add the candy. Her living room was a warren of baskets, ribbons, bows, beads, bangles, shredded cellophane in green and purple and yellow and pink, and decorative little plush-toy bunnies and baby chicks.. "What do you think of the exhibition," Junior asked, taking one step toward the musician, crowding him.. Junior vigorously scrubbed his corpse-licked cheek with one hand. Then he scrubbed his hand against the musician's raincoat.. To the window. The warm room sucked cooling fog out of the night, and she leaned across the sill into the streaming mist.. the sentences. The substance of what she said and the tone in which she said it were so perfect that it almost seemed as though an angel had relieved her of this burden by possessing her long enough to help her son understand what must happen and why.. "We don't sell no pizza," Angel said, because lately they had received a few calls for a new pizzeria with a phone number one digit different from theirs.. Because of the events regarding Barty and Angel back in January, Celestina, Grace, and Wally were no longer displaced persons waiting to return to San Francisco. They had begun anew here in Bright Beach; and judging by all indications, they were going to be as happy and as occupied with useful work as it was possible to be on this troubled side of the grave.. He never passed through a phase during which he grew resistant to hugging or kissing. He was a hand-holding, cuddling boy to whom displays of affection came easily.. Into her fevered mind came an image of a milk-glass infant, as translucent as Joey at the back door of the ambulance. Fearing that this vision meant her child would be stillborn, she said, My baby, but no sound escaped her.. "I don't like the old crazy doctor," she said, still drawing. "I wish it was about bunnies on vacation-or maybe a toad learns to drive a car and has adventures." "We have dams, though," said Jacob, gesturing with his fork. "The Johnstown Flood, 1889. Pennsylvania, sure, but it could happen here. And that was a one, let me tell you. The South Fork Dam broke. Wall of water seventy feet high totally destroyed the city. Your tornado killed almost seven hundred, but my dam killed two thousand two hundred and nine. Ninety-nine entire families were swept from the earth. Ninety-eight children lost both parents." She was a duplicitous bitch, too. After coming on to him, after teasing a reaction out of him, she had run off and gossiped about him as though he had instigated the seduction. Worse, to make herself feel important, she had told the police her skewed version, surely with much colorful embellishment.. Lipscomb turned to Celestina. "Before lapsing into semicoherence again, your sister said, 'Beezil and Feezil are safe with her,' which may sound less than coherent to you, but not to me." To buy as much time as possible while Enoch Cain's assault was still fresh in Celestina's mind, Tom proposed that they remain hidden away for another two weeks, unless the killer was apprehended sooner. "Then if you go to Wally's house from here, you'll want to install the best alarm system you can get, and you should lead a restricted life for quite a while, even hire security if you can afford it. The smartest thing would be to move out of San Francisco as soon as Wally's recovered. He retired young, right? And a painter can paint anywhere. Sell the properties here, start over somewhere else, and make the move in such a way that you can't be easily traced. I can help you work that out." Bartholomew had been able to focus his eyes much sooner than the average baby was supposed to be able to focus. To a surprising extent, he was already engaged in the world around him.. Junior's heart knocked so hard and fast that he wouldn't have been surprised if Vanadium, at the far end of the room, had begun to tap his foot in time with it.. Murmuring reassurances, Celestina put a hand on the girl's head and smoothed her brow, her hair, until the sour dream was sweetened by the touch.. At the bottom, the killer had pushed the cedar chest aside and clambered to his feet. From out of his raveled Tutankhamen windings, he peered up at Paul and fired one shot without taking aim, almost halfheartedly, before disappearing into the living room.. Even though the detective was on the wrong track, Junior was beginning to feel aggrieved. As any good citizen, he was willing, even eager to cooperate with responsible policemen who conducted their investigation by the book. This Thomas Vanadium, however, in spite of his monotonous voice and drab appearance, gave off the vibes of a fanatic.. Of all the kindnesses that we can do for one another, the most precious of all gifts-time-is not ours to

give. Bearing this in mind, Agnes did her best to guide her extended family through its grieving for Harrison and for Jacob, into happier days. Respect must be paid, precious memories nurtured, but life also must go on..Surprisingly, he received a lot of gratification from voicing this insult, even though Vanadium was too dead to hear it..He had bribed a parking attendant to keep his Mercedes at the curb in a valet zone, in front of a nearby restaurant, so it would be instantly available when needed. He could also leave the car and follow Celestina on foot if she chose to stroll home from here..Although Dr. Lipscomb spoke almost as softly as the long-winded pianist, and though the physician's narrow face was homely and devoid of any trace of violent temperament, Neddy Gnathic flinched from him and retreated across the threshold, into the hallway..He decided to use the tool just three times on each deadbolt before trying the door. The less noise the better. Maybe luck would be with him..Aftermath was not important. Only movement mattered. Just forget the busload of nuns smashed on the tracks, and stay with the onrushing train. Keep moving, looking forward, always forward..was trying her best to ensure the health of the baby while still remaining slim enough to avoid suspicion..As it turned out, Seraphim was a virgin. This thrilled Junior. He was inflamed also by the thought of ravishing her in her parents' house ... an by the kinky fact that their house was a parsonage..With a tenderness that surprises and moves Celestina, the tall nurse closes the dead girl's eyes. She opens a fresh, clean sheet and places it over the body, from the feet up, covering the precious face last of all..Indeed, as Celestina and the kid reached the foot of the steps to this second house, Bartholomew pointed, and the woman turned to look back. She appeared to stare straight at the Mercedes, though the fog made it impossible for Junior to be sure.. "Can't change your own form, even seemingly?"

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