Silent Jinny

If your corpse arrives from the gallows and still shows signs of life, you have several options. You can quickly and discreetly kill it, and go ahead with the anatomy class as if it had been a cadaver all along; you can reflect that the purpose of the class is to make us doctors, and spare no effort to preserve the patient's life and restore him, or preferably her, to health; or you can carry on and anatomize the specimen regardless, sharing knowing looks with those who also notice, and a certain nameless thrill at the warmth and suppleness of it all, the liquidness, the slight flutter from some internal organ – breaking the taboo, performing a vivisection, until the inevitable stillness falls. And then there is a fourth option ...

Having paid for her myself and tipped the men – ready cash and a wee dram (as they call it here) being all that is needed to make them address even a spotted youth as Your Worship and amble off merrily as if they had delivered a Christmas turkey – having paid for her myself I must wait for the morrow for reimbursement from the provost's clerk. For such things are always delivered late in the evening, if not in the middle of the night, whether removed legitimately from the gallows or with more (or less) discretion from the mortuary or the kirkyard. So – or thus I reasoned – until the morrow she is mine. Gallows meat is lawfully claimed by the anatomy school; the borough's fee and the delivery men's trouble have alike been satisfied; in the eyes of the law she – the person she was – is no more. So her body, her abandoned flesh and bone, belongs to me.

I placed it in a bathtub of warm water. It needed warming, but it also needed cleaning of course. They always do. The filthiest part though, the clothing, always disappears between the gallows and here, the men's wives or female accomplices remove it to sell, or to alter for use. The corpses always arrive naked in a shroud of sacking – which is just how we like them. She was actually not as dirty as they usually are. I washed her all over, I wiped her all over with a flannel. Apart from the usual excrement on her legs and bottom, that the shock or terror of hanging causes to be released, she was fairly clean, and soft, for a criminal. I did a thorough job. I paid careful attention to her less accessible places, for obvious reasons. I even, as best I could, cleaned within her several orifices.

I expected it would be a chore, not being able simply to scrub her with caustic soda and a stiff brush like we do the ones that are truly dead. But I found I enjoyed it; I took my time and became fascinated by her bits and bobs, her nooks and crannies. It struck me how little prepared we are, through familiarisation with our hard greyish corpses and their innerds, for the soft white pulchritude of living flesh, and the parts and particulars and pink bits thereof, especially female. I was so absorbed

in exploring them I nearly lost her, a muffled splutter made me realise her head had sank below the water while my eyes were occupied with something further down. It startled me because she had made no sound or movement until that point. It would not have mattered of course, yet I found myself importunate for her survival. Hanged and drowned both and still she gasps for life, I thought – what spirit, she deserves to live. I count it from that instant, as I lifted her face back into the air and thought that thought, and (also) what a silly little stumpy nose, I count it from that instant that I began to admire her – more shall we say than for her flesh alone.

I left her for a moment to go aloft and spread towels on my bed, and lifting her from the bathtub with somewhat more care than when I had plonked her in it, I carried her up the narrow stairs to my chamber and laid her there. The room was well heated, my fire having already been lit before they arrived with her, so with no more than a poke of the coals and gentle dabbing with towels she was soon dry and remained nice and warm. Her pulse was regular if not very strong, as too her quiet and (surprisingly) unimpeded breathing, but she remained in a deep or comatose sleep. So easing the towels from beneath her I pulled up the bedcovers and returned to my supper below.

Apart from bruising and abbrasion to the neck and some swelling, there was little or no sign of injury to her. I felt her throat may have sustained damage, internally, of a more permanent kind, and this was later confirmed. But it was not interfering with her breathing. Entering coma is a kind of shutting down process – indistinguishable from a stage in death when death occurs, but medically salutory when it does not – so I did not attempt to revive her to consciousness. Either she would mend and come out of it in her own time, or she would not. A strong probability, even though her heart and lungs had survived the ordeal, was that her brain had not – having certainly suffered some deprivation of blood and oxygen. In which case she would awake (if at all) with the content or workings of that delicate organ damaged – defective memories or intelligence, or none at all, or (in a worst prognosis) altogether lacking direction or control of her body. This too was to prove the case, but thankfully in only the mildest of the degrees mentioned.

By some fluke – relating I suppose to the positioning of the noose, aided perhaps by the slightness of her bodily weight, being a dinky wee tot (as they say here) – by some fluke she had hung by her neck for the couple of hours, or whatever it was, without the usual mortal effects of hanging. Her neck was not broken, her spine and attendant sinews and nerves and other tendrils of life were intact, so far as I could tell, and her essential organs had not ceased functioning. Her face was flushed at first but had not purpled; it bore a somewhat pained expression, as well it might, but it was not permanent and during the hours of unconsciousness resumed a more relaxed aspect, and paled. Not the sudden drop, nor the fierce grip of the noose, nor the

suspension of the body's weight entire from the fragile neck – each never mind the three sufficient to kill, which is why hanging is such a clever device – not one of them had managed to quench the life-force of my living corpse. Though affording her prolonged repose, and an appreciative new owner.

I returned to her at length, having supped and read awhile. I moistened her mouth with a little wine, but she did not swallow. Stoking up the fire but extinguishing the lamp, I joined her in my bed. I had intended – I make no secret of it, it was my intention from the start, it was the bent of my fourth option and my whole purpose in bathing her – you will have gathered, whether you have sympathised or reprehended, that the fourth option as I called it was to utilise her, being legally non-existent as a person and her body being my property by lawful purchase, to utilise her in the satisfaction of my carnal desires. My purpose in cleaning her and keeping her warm was neither humane nor medical, at its inception; it was preparatory to my own pleasure in enjoying her, or in violating her if you incline to see it thus. I was looking forward to it.

It had occurred to me before to try it with a corpse, needless to say – it is an obvious thing to consider, and I had duly mused upon it when first I embarked upon my responsibilities here. Morally I cannot, or anyway did not, then, see the harm in it, not so much on account of them being dead as from the thought of their bodies being in line for a much more horrid violation than mere lustful intrusion. But the reality of it, in particular the condition of those that I received, once taking up my post as resident curator and assistant demonstrator at the anatomy school, had by no means whetted my appetite or forwarded my intent in this regard.

Even the freshest, even the youngest and such as showed signs of having been bonny (as they say here), the females I mean, were invariably so discoloured by death or so eaten by what disease or violence had killed them, not to mention stiff and cold, and filthy, that any thought of taking even perfunctory pleasure with them was of fleeting duration. They stank too, though that at least was something to which my position soon made me immune. Grave goods were never fresh; sick-bed dregs were disgustingly unwholesome and often contagious; while gallows meat, mostly male, was always blackened and bloated about the face and soiled with excrement about the loins. Thus the lure of corpses rested into one of those fancies of the lascivious imagination that arise in absentia, to be rapidly dispelled by repugnance in the presence of the object of one's imagined desire. Much as happens with the tavern lassies, come to think.

Hence I suppose my being immediately drawn, and nearly overcome with delight, upon briefly pulling back the sacking and viewing the flushed face and pale freckled breast of my Jinny – which is what I call her, her name according to the notice at the prison being Jane Furnival

alias Galbraith, of Cloaghcraik, 22 or 23 years, laundress, condemned as accomplice to murder (I heard later she was the natural daughter of Galbraith, the notorious master of pickpockets and whores, who has been hung and anatomized since). Nearly overcome with delight, that is, at a circumstance and opportunity which, frankly, I had scarce anticipated. Nor much considered what I might do if it arose. My heart raced as I quickly threw the sackcloth back over her, lest the men too notice what was evident to me – not just the vivacity of her flesh, not just the prettiness of her breast, but, I could swear, a slight rise and fall of said flesh of said breast. I stepped to my bureau to pour them their toddies with an unsteady hand.

A fresh one and passing fair, said the man who speaks, tilting his head and opening one of his eyes wider than suited him. Yes by jove excellent first rate gosh the very thing well done, or some such string of english flummery as I usually use with them, I said as I fumbled with my purse. Your worship might think it a higher grade of merchandise than customary run of the mill, on this chill eve. Yes indeed by jingo absolutely just the ticket jolly well done. I never recollect what I say, even when I retain what people say to me, but it was of that ilke (as they say here) while I paid him the borough's usual fee and a considerably higher-value coin than usual, each, for their trouble – which I took to be his meaning. There was no menace in his voice, and he was correct of course – it *was* a chilly evening.

Yet it occurs to me now, thinking on his words, and recalling how obvious it was to *me* upon briefly unwrapping her, that they may have been complicit with me. Having taken the body down from the gallows, had their womenfolk undress it, wrapped and tied it in sacking, carried it to the back door of the anatomy school and up the lower stairs, and laid it on the slab in my reception room – how is it possible, dolts as they may be, that they had not noticed what was evident to me at a glance – that the merchandise was not merely a higher grade and passing fair, but was breathing?

Her body *was* fair, and allowing for the smallness of her stature, in nice proportion and shapely. Her face, though, was plain – the stubby wee nose I think is a matter of taste, I took an early liking to it, I know not why, though it is not the design that is generally accounted requisite to the faces of acknowledged beauties. She would not I think have turned my head had I encountered her vertical and clothed, in the street or in a tavern I mean. Unless perhaps her hair, at its fullest and allowed to billow and cascade, in a good light that flattered its redness – yes, that might have possessed the power to stir me. It had however been shorn to a bristling crop, and unevenly, as they do to prisoners, so its heart-stirring quality was not immediately apparent; but once grown back and abundant, framing her face and draping her shoulders, it improved her a muckle (as they say here). More than anything though, a face requires animation to display to its best. Not until her eyes opened, and widened and blinked – emerald green and full of innocent

sparkle – and her lips parted, and smiled – reddish and full of reasonably good teeth, bar the one cute gap – not until then was the transformation complete. I lost all interest in visiting the provost's clerk; my docket for the reimbursement was thrown into the fire. I knew I had spent my money wisely.

She was not a whore, by the way – it is my fault the word got around, for in grasping unprepared for an explanation of her, once her waking presence became known, I improvised a 'fallen woman' tale that sounded ennobling for me but less so for her. Congratulating myself upon the incidental irony, or pun, of her having fallen through a trap-door on the way here. Gallows females usually are of course – whores or as good as (or as bad as) – and doubtless her mother was, if Galbraith sired her. But I knew she was not one herself from my close examination of her privy passage. I paid particular attention to it as I bathed her – it was neat and tight and had barely been used. In continuing my familiarisation overnight, and in the morning, I concluded it was of good character, and fitted my requirements.

I have strayed from my narrative, and perhaps it is as well. For to take you through the evenings and mornings of our concubinage were tedious – albeit they were not so for me, nor for my Jinny – while to detail our transactions like the commentary to a dissection, or indeed a vivisection – as I confess I began intending to do – indiscreet and improper. So I will say a little more of our first night together, and the day following, to make the story cohere in spite of my digressions, and then aprise you of our present happy state and draw to a close.

As I was saying, I joined her in my bed – I had no guest bed, nor space for one, nor even a couch, my official residence as curator and assistant demonstrator was but a parlour leading off the anatomy school's reception room (as we called it, for the reception and initial preparation of corpses) plus a wee attic bed-chamber above, up some steep narrow stairs. The position sounds grand but is an inferior one, given usually to a mediocre student – for the bad students cannot do it, or cannot stomach it, while the good ones will in no wise stoop to it, aspiring to lucrative practices or professorships – and is compensated chiefly, the salary being derisory, by the grace-and-favour apartment and greater opportunities to tamper with the permanent collections and transient specimens. An opportunity or privilege that I suppose I exploited in somewhat of an unintended way, that chilly November night. We were not chilly though, attic and bed and eventually my passion were warm. I have drifted into digression again – I am constantly criticised for it by my students.

Joining her in bed, in my bed, and lying beside her, tracing the contoured landscape of her body with my hand, encountering landmarks, braes and glens, already visited in the wet with which my fingers were pleased now to renew their acquaintance and linger, finding myself comfortable snuggled against her in a half embrace,

flesh to flesh, my face at her neck ... thus we lay. To my surprise, but not entirely to my disappointment, a sense of caring for her, as one who was precious to me, discovered itself stronger in me than the expected impulse of lust. My intention to have my carnal pleasure with her succumbed to the tenderer pleasure of caressing, and at length, helped by the wine and the lateness of the hour, I slept. We slept. Thus the notion I had at first entertained or persuaded myself of – that I owned her body, or the body, an anatomical specimen, and could do as I pleased with it – the notion underwent transmutation into an affectionate attachment to it, or to her, body and person and living soul. And I am glad it was so. I am not much bothered by morals, or anyway moral qualms, as you will have gathered; but I am not averse to discovering a decent person within me. And it has abided to this day, my affectionate attachment to her I mean.

I half expected she might die in the night, that first night, it would not have surprised me. When I woke to the grey light of dawn that the garrett window admits, making her deathly white, that was my first thought; but then I realised that my arm laid across her breast was registering a gentle, regular rise and fall. I cannot express the rush of satisfaction that came upon me – that she was there with me, that she was alive, and that she was mine. I had, I confess, never before shared my bed with a sleeping female – sleeping I said – I had never woken thus. This thrill and the benefit of sleep (mine at any rate) conduced now to the rise of energetic passion in me, and so in the pale dawn, without qualm or compunction but (I must insist) with true affection, I did now mount her, easing her legs apart, and enter her in intimacy. I held her in tight embrace and stamped her head with kisses as I carried out the carnal act.

I continued kissing her when I finished, her face and about her bosom, and then I laid my head there, on her soft freckled breast, and wept. It was not remorse – I do not know what to call it. It was an outflowing of inner emotion, after the bodily pleasure I had known, which was very intense; it was, I like to think, an expression of the fondness and gratitude I felt to her. I even went so far as to feel gratitude to god, or fate, or john knox, one or other such chimera, for sending her to me, for sparing her life in so peculiar and improbable a way, so that I may know and possess her. I *never* think in such terms, and consider it silly now; but the point I suppose is that I was not thinking, I was *feeling*, emotionally. And as I did so, as I rested my head on her chest and sobbed, she moved slightly and sighed.

After a surprised and expectant pause, I raised myself and made doctorly inspection of her – her eyelids, her pulse, which was stronger. My carnal act upon her had quickened her, and roused her from her comatose state. I began – I had not hitherto done so – I now began speaking to her. I hardly remember what I said, only that it was kindly and welcoming, and accompanied by more kisses. She sighed again, and turned towards me, onto her side, and fidgetted somewhat, as

sleepers do in their sleep. Then she stilled and continued sleeping. But although she slept, she slept – that is, to the best of my judgement she had risen from coma, or I had resurrected her from it, and was now simply, and beautifully and naturally, sleeping.

It was with unaccustomed chirpiness that I washed and dressed and carried out my morning's chores – omitting but one, the visit to the cashier in the provost's office. Wilcox asked me if I'd come into a fortune, and said he'd not heard me humming before. I hum still, it is now regarded as a characteristic. I love my work, I said to him, not entirely disingenuously. I think you've found yourself a lassie, he said, more perceptively than I expected of him. Which tavern were you stalking yester-night? Later on he looked at the register and asked me what became of the gallows meat we were expecting last evening – should he send to see why the men hadn't brought it? Oh no no they it's no it's I err etcetera approximates to what I said at first, until taking a long breath and lying – to the effect that they had sent word they were unable to obtain it for some reason, but it was no matter, we had enough bits left for this week anyway. We've had no female bits for ages, and I need a uterus, he said sulkily, and went off to his pickling. I am not going to demean myself by making the obvious jest.

I took her breakfast in bed at lunch time, waking her with a rattle of the things, a shake of the shoulder, and a kiss – as if it were the normalest awakening and our usual routine. She roused, a little bleary, blinked her eyes open, mossy green, raised herself up, and played along with my spurious air of normality – leastways she did not evince surprise or bafflement, nor ask me who I thought I was. She was too weak to use her hands reliably, or they were lagging behind her in sleeping; so propped up with pillow and cushions – and incidentally showing no modesty regarding the bareness of her bosom – and having coughed for a few minutes and vented some phlegm that had gathered in her throat (which is entirely to be expected), she swallowed what I spooned into her mouth, albeit with evident soreness. Soon she seemed weary and went back into a doze as she sat.

I returned at tea-time to find her awake with a shamed and tearful expression on her face, and an interesting smell about her. Pulling the bedcovers away, she sat in a large wet patch. I kissed and embraced her with delight – I truly was pleased, I cannot think of a better sign of inner health than the returning normality of her necessary bodily functions. Having wiped her privates and helped her to a chair – she walked a little by herself – I turned the mattress and changed the undersheet. Looking upon her as I did so, slumped in my easy chair like a forlorn child, I got my reward in the first of her lovely wide smiles, that have since become a daily illumination to my life and my spirit.

She seemed unashamed even unconscious of her bareness (and remains to this day devoid of shyness); she showed no curiosity as to where she

was or how she came here or whom she was with, nor indeed who she herself was (nor ever has); and she never ever said a word. She never did, never has, she has never spoken at all – though as well as her regular hollow-sounding coughs she can make whispery murmers and sighs. Her sighs and murmers are, at times, very eloquent, and I am everso fond of them. The parts of her throat that make voiced speech were doubtless damaged in the hanging. But I think her brain must have been emptied of words or the capacity for utterance, for she has never attempted to speak, nor – which she could do, physically, I would have thought – to whisper or mouth words.

Memory is clearly lost too, by no means entire but sufficient of it to deprive her of any sense of her identity or past; and in some degree – her kitten-like loyalty and affectionateness, her unquestioning acceptance of her circumstance, her lack of curiosity as to her history – in some degree her intellect could be mistaken for something akin to simple-mindedness. But I do not countenance her being described thus – Wilkie did it a couple of times but saw how it irked me, and soon he too perceived the spirit and intelligence in her, and liked her, once I let him encounter her. Indeed he helped me by getting clothing for her, having a couple of bonny wee sisters to hand.

What's this about you keeping a bare wee lassie in the attic? he said one day. Mrs Terrie who comes in and does cleaning and bed changing on Fridays – I forgot about her and was in the class when she came, that week, so she got a surprise – she said absolutely nothing to me, ever, but I believe told everyone else over a radius of several streets; and then brought in some toilet things and a hairbrush, bless her. I decided not to mind, not to apologise. I told Wilkie she was a poor dumb fallen woman I had nursed back to health from an (unspecified) illness, it sounded well gallant of me by the time I finished the tale, and fallen women were much in vogue at the time – rescuing them from it, that is. The moot point of whether they are truly rescued if taken into one's own bed – nor how gallant – went unspoken.

Anyway, I said I would not detain you with tedious narrative of our peculiar yet ordinary domestic arrangement, and our life together since. Jinny, my Jinny, my unspeaking Jinny, for all her silence, proved a most communicative personality, friendly and gay and affectionate, full of smiles and fond touches. Whatever had gone missing from her brain did not spoil that, nor our intimate relations, in which, I venture to say, she took as muckle a delight as I (as they say here). Without ceasing to be submissively feminine, she seemed to obtain bodily pleasure as acute as my own – I am not sure it was not oftentimes more so. She had not, by the way, lost direction of any of her parts or functions – she had control of her bladder, the accident as I rightly anticipated was unique and entirely forgiveable, for one barely awakened from coma and not knowing where the chamber pot was kept; when awake moreover she has control of the musculature pertaining to each of her several passages, as I can personally attest.

As soon as she was feeling able she made herself an early riser and a busy little housemaid, or whatever term may be apposite; she remembered or rapidly learnt – incidentally proving her not at all simple-minded in the usual sense, her basic intellectual capability undamaged – she remembered or learnt activities like cleaning and cooking and bedmaking, and in time she began assisting me with anatomical preparations (she is not at all squeamish). I am not saying that I put her to work and made a slave of her – she *wanted* to do these things, being busy and active by nature, and devoted to helping me. Even before she was yet strong enough – and even before she had anything to wear – I came upon her a number of times cleaning the parlour or washing my clothes or trying to cook a meal. Provided with a pinafore and shown where the pans were kept, her domestication was complete. Her throat ceased to be sore after a regime of liquid foods (standard fare in the land of broth and porridge); she coughs awhile upon waking but otherwise is not much troubled by it. Meanwhile her seeming oblivion as to what she was or had been, her amnesia of the ordeal she had been through, I expect were a blessing for her – her inner thoughts, her dreams, are never troubled with guilt or horror.

Nor are mine. For whatever my initial intentions, or actions, I kept her from what is truly (whatever other things the phrase may be applied to) a fate worse than death. Quickly becoming fond of her, body and soul, starting from her funny wee nose (more or less), I have kept her with me and provided for her, and cared for her, and she for me. She is with me still. In her silent, accepting way she has never seemed to entertain for a second any thought of going her own way or finding somewhere or someone else; while for my part I have never once thought of relinquishing her (duly paid for). Through various changes of occupation and abode, the usual struggles of building a life and career, she has been with me, following me like a faithful puppy; and we are now comfortably settled in a small country town. I did not proceed to my full medical qualification, but I practise here as a surgeon and druggist, and also teach private pupils in anatomy and physiology. Frogs, rats, and dogs are the specimens you get in small towns – I am done with gallows meat.

So as we look towards middle life we are settled and content and enjoy fairly comfortable circumstances, my dear wife and I. And also, I should mention, our four children, and a fifth in the oven (as they say), who is likely to be the last. Jinny is wonderful with them, and although she cannot speak her nice personality and her loving and tactile nature make up for it a hundredfold, and the bairns (as they call them here) love her for it. She caresses them to sleep each night, as effective as any lullaby – I can personally vouch for it. She cannot read – I tried teaching her but it was hopeless, hilariously hopeless, and (I soon realised) what of it? Among housekeeperly accomplishments her cooking is tolerable, her cleaning vigorous, and her black-leading attrocious, while her original (purported) profession of laundress is

evident in her devotion to starch and bleach and the scrubbing-board. She likewise retains from somewhere – I certainly did not teach her – a rude accomplishment in the art of knitting, and makes the children all manner of clumsy, malformed garments that are none the less useful against the chilly evenings. All told she is the most efficient and able manager of our household I could have imagined, she takes it all in her stride. And now we are better able to afford we have a maid to work under her.

And she looks forward, as do I, to my visits to her room – a cosy little attic room she has, reminiscent of our first poor, snug apartment. She is always welcoming and eager when I join her there, always uncomplicated, always affectionate and before long passionate. They are not I think as often as she would like, my visits, though it is not my dear wife that keeps me from her so much as my other interests (as I call them), including that which I have lately taken in the maid, a scrawny wee thing of tender years, whose cubicle near the kitchen I also visit. She is coming on nicely, under my tuition, though *her* reading is abominable too.

I am tolerably fond of my dear wife of course, and her father's position is what helped us get settled here. Once our fourth child at long last proved a boy he made over the deeds of the house entirely to us. I confess when he first suggested I wed her in lieu of rent I thought it a jest less in its audacity than in its plain contradiction of her manifest devotion to spinsterhood. It had escaped my notice that she harboured a liking for me, and indeed I have had more evidence for it in her father's assurances than her own. Though needless to say I welcomed the opportunity to embed myself in the local community.

For all her fertility – and her genuine wish, I think, to have children, I cannot accept it was entirely to please her father – for all her fertility my dear wife does not take pleasure in carnal relations. So although we speak of it but obliquely, she accepts that I frequent Jinny's bed, and call upon Mrs Murren's daughters when they are in season (as local wags say – meaning when their father is on the drove), and also now and then – in my capacity as a conscientious medical advisor you understand – look in upon the advocate's neice (for he pays her scant attention); while she has positively encouraged me to take an avuncular interest in wee Aggie, our maid. It affords my dear wife relief from what would otherwise be a burdensome wifely duty, as too might be said of Jinny's command of the household and care of the bairns. It has all worked out for the best.

Ironically, having taken inaugural pleasure with my silent Jinny when she was no more than a breathing corpse, in her deep sleep on the morning after I purchased her, as I have recounted, she will since in no wise tolerate such a thing. I cannot even pursuade her to lie still and pretend, for the carnal act with mutual and joyous participation therein is her greatest pleasure in life, I think, as it is very nearly mine also, or

one of them. Whereas on the occasions I exercise my conjugal rights upon my dear wife I have devised the ruse of doing so, in considerateness of her indifference to it, when she is soundly asleep, which I aid by the discreet administration of a draft – for she is a devotee of all sorts of tonics, elixirs, pick-me-ups, and their relaxing counterparts. I confess I find it a pleasurable treat and look forward to it, servicing my dear wife as she sleeps, for in my mind, in my heart, it is not my dear wife but my Jinny – it is a re-enactment of that blissful morn in the anatomy school attic with my very own living corpse, pale in the dawn light, bought and paid for, fresh and passing fair.

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Note
R. L. Stevenson's story "The Body-Snatcher" (1884) supplied some inspiration and also the name Jane Galbraith.

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