

Introduction

Welcome to a collection of true stories, plucked straight from the era of gas lamps, fog and horrid murders. If you love murder and mystery, you'll find something here to enjoy.

Known as the Old Bailey, the Central Criminal Court in London provides a fantastic amount of information on the life and times of Victorian London. Verbatim accounts of trials offer wonderful glimpses into the lives of Londoners.

You never know what you'll find; I discovered the charming use of "tea" as a verb, as in "I tea'd with my aunt." Now, I say it all the time. Read on and enjoy tales of true crime and murder from the early 19th century...

Oh, by the way, if you enjoy historical murder, mystery and romance, try my Victorian novels *An Independent Woman* and *Danger at Thatcham Hall*, both available from Amazon.

The Murder of Mary Emsley

Mary Emsley, an elderly widow, lived at No 9 Grove Road in London's Stepney. She owned many properties left by her husband and lived comfortably, though frugally, on the rents collected from tenants.

On Thursday 17 August 1860, Walter Emm, a shoemaker who often collected rent on her behalf, reported her missing to the police.

The police found Mrs Emsley lying dead in a bedroom in her house, in a pool of blood, her head violently beaten. A large footprint in blood pointed out of the bedroom door. She'd been attacked with an instrument that could have been a hammer.

The time of her death was suggested by Samuel Gill, a surgeon, to be on or around Monday 13 August. Mrs Emsley was seen alive that evening between 7 and 8pm, but not later.

On Tuesday 14th and Wednesday 15th, several callers failed to get a response when they came to her house. A neighbour noticed her window had been open, unusually, after 10pm on Monday, and that it remained open.

The time of death was therefore agreed to be between 8 and 10pm on Monday 13 August.

There were two main suspects in the case. One was James Mullins, a plasterer and ex-policeman from Ireland, who also worked for Mrs Emsley. The other was Walter Emm, the man who alerted the police.

For two weeks, no arrest was made. Then, James Mullins visited a police officer, with a tale that appeared to show Walter Emm's guilt. He said he'd seen Emm hide a small parcel in a shed beside the Emm's family home.

At first, the police failed to find the parcel, until Mullins showed them exactly where it was, behind a stone.

The parcel contained newspaper, blotting paper, a silver tablespoon, 3 silver teaspoons and 2 magnifying lenses, plus a cheque for £10. All the items belonging to Mrs Emsley. The cheque proved to be from a man called John Carrier, in payment of his rent. The parcel was fastened with waxed string and a piece of tape.

Emm soon proved to have an alibi for the evening of Monday 13th. He'd been driven to Stratford along with his wife, by a Mr Rumble, who corroborated his story. Emm even managed to produce a dated toll ticket as proof.

Mullins, on the other hand, found it less easy to prove his innocence, as several circumstances suggested he was involved in the crime.

The police found a plasterer's hammer on the floor of his rooms. The surgeon believed it could have inflicted the appalling blows to the head that killed the poor old woman: one injury was measured at 1½ inches, corresponding to the sharp edge of the hammer.

Emm's daughter testified she had seen Mullins, near the shed where the parcel was found, on the Saturday two weeks after the murder.

Two witnesses identified Mullins, one seeing him in Grove Road on the evening of

Monday, 13 August, the day of the murder, and another reporting he had not come to work on the Tuesday. Both agreed he wore a wide-awake, or billy-cock hat, although he denied owning one. It later emerged that his son had such a hat.

Mullins' landlady said she saw a boot thrown from Mullins' window two weeks after the murder, after he'd been interviewed by the police.

The boot had a blood spot, although forensic tests were not available then to detect whether or not the blood was human. The boot also appeared to correspond slightly, although not conclusively, to the bloody footprint.

A neighbour testified to seeing someone moving paper-hangings around in Mrs Emsley's room, where the window was open a little, on Tuesday morning. This was twelve hours after the time of the old lady's death.

A builder said he saw a man called Rowland emerge from a house in Grove Street holding wallpaper on Tuesday morning, although further investigation suggested Rowland may have been papering the house next door. Rowland's unconvincing response, however, was that the witness was unstable.

These attempts to present a possible defence case did not convince the jury, and nor did the garbled and contradictory evidence of Mullin's adult sons. They became hopelessly confused in the witness box, as they struggled to give him an alibi.

Mullins was found guilty and sentenced to death. The judge, though, did not appear as convinced of his guilt as the jury had been. He went out of his way to suggest that if Mullins could, "Make it manifest that you are innocent of the charge...every attention will be paid to any cogent proof."

Nevertheless, Mullins was hanged on 19 November 1860, leaving behind a statement still claiming his innocence.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle took a keen interest in murder cases at the Old Bailey. He believed Mullins may have been mistakenly blamed for the murder of Mrs Emsley, and that his execution was little short of judicial murder. Conan Doyle thought the Scottish verdict of "not proven" which was not, and still is not, available in England, would have been a more appropriate verdict.

Arsenic and Apples

When London grandfather Samuel Nelme sprinkled sugar on his stewed apple, one day in 1847, he had no idea he would be dead within five days.

Sadly for him, the bowl contained arsenic mixed with pounded sugar. Samuel, a Londoner of around 73 years of age, kept arsenic at home in Hackney in a locked drawer. He used it for killing rats, a common practice in Victorian times. Arsenic was used for a wide range of purposes, including as make-up to keep the complexion white, in green paint and in wallpaper dye.

William Newton Allnutt, Samuel's twelve-year-old grandson, was accused of the crime. At his trial at The Old Bailey, the jury heard that others in the house also fell ill, including Samuel's widow, who used sugar from the same bowl to sweeten her own arrowroot after Samuel's death.

The doctor then passed some of the sugar to a London Hospital physician who discovered arsenic in the sugar as well as in Samuel's stomach and liver.

William was 12 years old at the time. The court asked many questions about his state of mind: he had fallen on a ploughshare at the age of 18 months, suffered from headaches, talked of voices in his head and walked in his sleep.

Two doctors, one in practice at Clapton and one from a lunatic asylum, agreed he was of unsound mind, although the surgeon at Newgate Prison disagreed.

William had once stolen a watch, claiming that voices told him to do so.

After a session with the Chaplain in Newgate Prison, William wrote a long confession to his mother, saying he was terrified God would not forgive him if he did not confess. He wrote that his grandfather had "knocked me down into a passage" and threatened to kill him.

William was sentenced to death, although he was too young to be hanged. Instead, his sentence was commuted to transportation. He spend four years at Newgate Prison before leaving from Plymouth in 1851 for Fremantle, Australia. Two years later, he died of tuberculosis while still in Fremantle Prison.

The Duel

Hear about a duel, and you imagine glamorous Georgian gentlemen politely settling their differences. Whatever the cause, there's no denying the romance of the idea. Since the 17th century, a fight between two men, conducted in a gentlemanly manner, had been an acceptable way of settling a disagreement over debts, cheating at cards or stealing a lady's affections.

In 19th century England, law and order was beginning to take hold: the Metropolitan police were established in London in 1829. By then, killing a man in a duel was murder. However, the police found it difficult to successfully prosecute. Somehow, witnesses seemed quite unable to identify the participants.

On 1 July 1843, one of the last duels in England took place between Colonel David Lynar Fawcett of the 55th Regiment and his brother in law, Lieutenant Alexander Thompson Munro, of the Royal Horse Guards, who was married to Colonel Fawcett's sister.

The full reason for their dispute is unclear, but it appeared to be about family property or, possibly, an insult to Mrs Fawcett.

The separate trials of Lieutenants William Cuddy and Duncan Grant, for the murder of Colonel Fawcett, highlight the difficulties facing the police and courts in establishing guilt for the death of one of the duellists.

Early in the morning of 1 July, Police Constable John Jones saw two carriages, a phaeton and a brougham, collecting a total of five gentlemen and heading to the toll-gate near the Brecknock Arms in Camden.

Edward Davis, the toll-keeper, watched as the gentlemen walked away in separate small groups, into the fields. Ten minutes or so later, two returned and left the scene in a carriage. Mr Davis maintained he heard and saw nothing of note during the events that led to Colonel Fawcett's death, although after 15 minutes or so he went over to the scene and summoned PC Jones for help.

Jones found Colonel Fawcett on the ground in the field, accompanied by two other men. One was George Gulliver, a surgeon in the Royal Horse Guards. The other was unknown to Jones.

The colonel was taken to the Brecknock Arms, but was refused entry and the party had to travel on to the Camden Arms. A surgeon was sent for and attended him there, but a bullet had entered the colonel's chest and he died two days later.

During the first trial in August that year, Lieutenant William Cuddy was accused of murder. He had accompanied the principals to the field and was believed to have supplied a brace of pistols. However, during his trial, the witnesses had great trouble identifying him.

The surgeon, George Gulliver, who had also originally been charged with the offence but released, identified Lieutenant Munro and Mr Grant, but was unwilling to identify Cuddy. The surgeon stated that, perhaps rather judiciously, he had momentarily turned away from the group of men when the shot was fired.

In evidence, Gulliver claimed Munro said, “Fawcett, I thought you were levelling at me.” To which the colonel replied, “I was not levelling,” perhaps suggesting that Munro fired early.

Gulliver sent Cuddy away from the field, to fetch help. During the trial, he claimed not to be sure that the defendant, Cuddy, was in fact the man at the scene.

There was a brief attempt to suggest that Fawcett might have shot himself, but the surgeon, Liston, who attended him at the Camden Arms, explained that the man’s arm must have been ‘raised very much,’ perhaps as he levelled his pistol.

William Cuddy was acquitted of murder.

Lieutenants Grant and Munro had fled the scene and travelled abroad, but Grant surrendered himself in December 1843.

Early the next year, Lieutenant Duncan Grant was duly brought to trial for the murder. Once again, the exact details of the affair were difficult to establish. The livery stable keeper, Mr Holland, from whom Fawcett had ordered a carriage, was unable to identify Grant as the same gentleman he saw with Munro in the phaeton.

A private in the Royal Horse Guards, one Charles Longman, worked for Munro. He was unable to identify two of the other three men involved in the affair, although he recognised the surgeon, George Gulliver. One of the men ‘had moustaches.’

When asked whether the prisoner was the man with the moustaches, seen with Munro, Longman said he thought the prisoner’s hair was darker.

The toll collector maintained he saw five gentlemen, heard no shots and could not say whether the prisoner was one of the men at the scene.

George Gulliver was also unable to recall seeing Grant at the scene following the shooting, although he had named him as one of the five in the field.

Lieutenant Grant was acquitted of murder.

Lieutenant Munro was finally tried in 1847.

This time, the surgeon, Gulliver, recalled Munro saying he had no desire to take part in the ‘meeting’, but had been insulted in front of a servant.

Gulliver’s recollection of the words Munro used after the affair had changed a little. He described Munro as saying that Fawcett was, ‘covering me,’ meaning he was deliberately taking aim. Gulliver described Munro in warm terms, as a distinguished officer and the kindest of gentlemen.

Lieutenant Cuddy was called as a witness at Munro’s trial and, after being handed a pardon, ‘under the great seal of her Majesty,’ for his part in the affair, gave an account of the dual.

Cuddy had supplied pistols and Lieutenant Grant had given the agreed signal: “Gentlemen, are you ready, fire.” Munro fired instantly. Munro said, “Did you see him, he covered me as dead as possible; he intended to shoot me,” and tried to shake hands

with Fawcett, but Cuddy's view was that hands were not shaken. Munro then said he forgave Fawcett and left the field.

Cuddy, like so many other witnesses in the case, seemed to have difficulty in identifying the participants in the affair. He would not or could not positively identify the prisoner as Munro, saying he had seen him only once since the meeting.

Munro was found guilty and sentenced to death, with a strong recommendation to mercy. He was not hanged, but was sent to Newgate prison for a year.

An Unsolved Murder Mystery

In the four a.m. darkness of a day in July 1858, Eliza Simpson, a married woman of Keate Street in London, shrieked “Murder.” A labourer in the house she occupied, along with her husband, ran to discover a man, Michael Murphy, kicking her with his wooden leg. “If you come near, you black b....., I will serve you the same,” said Murphy.

As Eliza tried to escape down the stairs, her attacker threw her down from one landing to the next. She died a week later from brain injuries.

At the time, Eliza was recovering from a black eye, inflicted in unknown circumstances about five weeks earlier. She had drunk three half-pints of porter on the day of the attack and it was claimed that she was, “in the habit of drinking.”

A few days after the attack, another woman punched her in the face as she smoked a pipe in the local Spitalfields public house, The White Swan. Next day, she died without the benefit of medical help.

The man with a wooden leg, Michael Murphy, was sentenced to twelve months imprisonment for manslaughter.

What was Eliza doing with Murphy at 4 a.m? Was she a prostitute? Where was her husband, and why was she attacked?

The crime report answers none of these intriguing questions.

Murder at Manor Place

A sudden noise above their heads startled Philip and Susannah Beard awake, early in the morning of 31 July 1860. As Philip hurried upstairs to the third floor of 16 Manor Place, he heard a scream.

At first, he saw only a spot of blood on the stairs, then as he climbed higher, he found the body of an 11-year-old boy lying dead on the landing. The boy's throat had been cut. "Murder!" Philip cried. There was more horror beyond.

Next to the young boy Philip found a woman, lying dead on her face. A second woman lay on her left. In the next room, on a bed, he found another young boy of around 7 years of age.

John Youngman, a tailor, lived in 16 Manor Place, Walworth, with his wife and two young sons, Thomas and Charles. An older son, William, had been there for a week, after giving notice to his employer, Dr Duncan. William had worked for Dr Duncan as a footman.

Mary Wells Streeter, William's sweetheart, came to stay on 30 July 1860. She and William went out for the evening, returning on good terms at 10 pm. That night, William slept in a bed with Thomas, their father in the same room. Mary and Charles spent the night in the next room, with Mr Youngman's wife.

At 5 o'clock in the morning of July 31, Mr Youngman left home to go to work with another son, John, at the tailor's workshop. At 6.20am he was called home to the horrific scene.

His wife, two sons and Mary were all dead. Mary and the two boys had all been stabbed and had their throats cut, while Youngman's wife had died from stab wounds. There were two adult footprints in the copious blood in the room.

William, present at the time, with blood on his hands and feet and a torn nightshirt, told the police, "My mother has done all this, she has murdered my two brothers and my sweetheart and I - in self-defence - I believe I have murdered her."

William owned the knife used in the attacks, claiming he used it for food. The point was broken off by the violence of the attacks.

William's family had a history of insanity, with his maternal grandmother dying in a lunatic asylum and his father's father having spent some time in an asylum.

The most damning evidence in the case came in the form of letters.

William had asked Mary Streeter to marry him. The police found a series of letters kept in a box, to which William had the key. The letters were long and full of expressions of love and arrangements for the marriage.

July 13: *We will be married at St Martin's Charing Cross on Saturday Aug 11th next... You need only wear your black clothes, my dear girl, at our wedding.*

I have published the banns of our marriage... After marriage you will have all you wish for: the clothes you have will do for the present... I want to assure your life when you come up on Monday week...

July 16 In this letter, William explains that he has given notice to leave his post in

order to get married. He says he will *Give Mrs Duncan a good talking to...when I hope the doctor will tell me to go at once...*

He writes that this will enable him to leave early, but still have his wages paid until 11 August.

He tells Mary to send him the details he needs for the life assurance policy, including her birth certificate and the ages of her parents. He also instructs her to state that no one in the family has died of any one of a list of diseases, including consumption. Although her sister had succumbed to this disease less than twelve months earlier, William was at pains to explain that Mary must say all were healthy. *The policy will be for £100.*

The next letter William sends to Mary is undated. He writes *I am very much hurt to find you state in your note that you do not wish to have your life assured...*

He refers, ungrammatically, to her parents. *You can do has you like without them preventing.*

If Mary continues to refuse to allow him to take out life assurance, William tells her *I cannot think you would love me...*

On 19 July, William wrote again. Mary had clearly agreed to go ahead with the life assurance policy. *Do not say anything to your mother about what you are going to do...*

By 21 July, Mary must have changed her mind again, for William writes, *I am very much hurt to find you say you will not have your life assured...I cannot believe you love me unless you do...You have promised me, now if you love me do this.*

28 July. The business clearly settled, William writes again to Mary, now calling her *My beloved Polly*. He gives instructions for Mary to meet him on Monday 30th July at London Bridge Station. She is to bring or burn all her letters.

The policy, for £100, effected by William Godfrey Youngman on the life of Mary Wells Streeter, and commencing on 25th July, was produced in court. It contained Mary's untrue response, *No*, to the question *Has any member of your family died of consumption?*

Given the chilling evidence of a motive, it is no surprise the jury brought in a verdict of guilty. It took less than half an hour for them to reach their decision.

William Godfrey Youngman was sentenced to death. He was hanged on 4 September 1860 at Horsemonger Lane Gaol, in front of an audience of 30,000. He refused to admit to the offence even at the gallows.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle wrote a highly embellished account of this affair in the Strand Magazine of 1901, calling it *The Holocaust of Manor Place*.

Disaster at Sonning Cutting

Eight people died in a dreadful train crash on the Great Western Railway, at Sonning Cutting, in the early hours of Christmas Eve 1841, leading to the enforcement of better safety regulations by legislation in 1844.

In the dark and cold of a winter morning, at 4.30am on 24 December 1841, labourers returning home from London for Christmas piled onto two third-class carriages at the Paddington terminus. There were just under 40 passengers in total. The journey to Bristol was expected to take 10 or 12 hours.

Their carriages were placed between the tender and the station truck, with 17 heavy goods wagons travelling behind. Third class carriages had no coverings at that time and were left open to the weather. This had been poor that year with an excessively wet autumn. The seats in the carriages were 18 inches high, but the sides only two feet tall.

The train's route took it via Twyford, where it arrived at around 6.40am. The train was running ten minutes late as it left the station, with Reading the next stop. Was it running fast to make up time? After 2½ miles it came to what was then known as the Sunning-Hill Cutting, cut through clay and gravel, 60ft deep and more than a mile long.

In the pitch black of the night, at around 6.45am, the train hit an obstacle, later discovered to be a land slip caused by recent heavy rain. The engine left the rails but did not overturn. The carriages containing passengers, though, were overrun by the following truck, which was in turn pushed forward by the goods wagons behind.

All the passengers were thrown out, eight were killed and 17 injured.

The first report, written on 25 December by Lt Col Frederic Smith, Inspector-General of Railways, suggested that the loss of life may have been less if spring buffers had been attached to the passenger carriages, with a white reflector lamp on the buffer beam.

In Lt Col Smith's opinion, passengers should not be travelling on any train that carried heavy goods wagons.

Within three days, on 28 December, the Board of Trade wrote to the Great Western Railway Company, recommending that spring buffers should be fitted and the sides and ends of the passenger wagons be raised to at least four feet six inches above the floor.

The Company replied the next day, stating that such improvements had been agreed "some weeks ago" and were already in hand.

The real-life tragedy at Sonning forms a vital part of the plot of *An Independent Woman*. Philomena Tailor is escaping an enemy in London and heading for Bristol, when her train is derailed. That's when her adventures really begin...

Victorian England: a few facts

When *An Independent Woman* was published, set firmly in the early Victorian era, some readers were surprised by the manners and customs of the time, so here are a few facts designed to help navigate through the parallel worlds of Thatcham Hall and Victorian London.

Victorian England in the 1840s was a very real and sometimes surprising place. Life upstairs in a Great House was very different from the world downstairs, and both lifestyles must have been much more comfortable than the circumstances of the average Londoner.

Great country houses

Built by the old aristocracy several hundred years before the Victorian era, these huge buildings supported communities with as many as 60 estate workers and indoor servants. The Victorians enjoyed improving their houses. The wealth of the new middle class, based on mechanisation and factories in the north of England, allowed them to buy houses that previously belonged to the aristocracy.

Servants

Working at the grandest and wealthiest houses bathed servants in the reflected glow of “their” family’s importance. A butler managed the male servants, reporting directly to the head of the household. Responsible for the wine cellar and the silver, he enjoyed a position of authority over the other servants who addressed him as *Mr*. Lesser servants were known by their surnames, except for the housekeeper and cook who used the honorary title of *Mrs*.

Domestic servants ran the house from behind the green baize door. Maids took orders from the housekeeper, who communicated directly with the mistress of the house. Kitchen staff led by the cook prepared vast quantities of food, not only for the family upstairs but also for the staff who ate in the servants’ hall. Separate staircases allowed the family to avoid bumping into their servants unexpectedly.

The governess

The status of nursemaids and governesses hovered somewhere between upstairs and downstairs. They ate with the children, reported to the mistress of the house and could exercise a little one-upmanship over the downstairs staff, by requesting special meals for the children and themselves, brought up on trays.

The Wealthy

Very wealthy young girls “came out” of the schoolroom at 16 years of age or so, to be presented at Court, at the Queen Charlotte’s Ball in London. Magnificently dressed in white, they curtsied deeply to Queen Victoria herself, practising diligently beforehand for fear of toppling over. The London Season was their marriage market. Balls, dances,

concerts and drives along Rotten Row in Hyde Park were opportunities to meet suitable husbands.

Meals

In Great Houses, dining took place around 8 or 9 o'clock in the evening. The family filled the long gap between lunch and dinner with a cup of tea and a biscuit, allegedly following the inspired example of Anna, 7th Duchess of Bedford, in the early 1800s. There are, however, reports of English ladies drinking tea in the afternoon, well before the Duchess's time. This repast became the elegant "tea party" where the lady of the house poured tea from porcelain tea pots into delicate cups for visitors.

Christmas

At Christmas, the table in a Great House groaned under the weight of food, including turkey, geese, game, poultry, pork, sausages, oysters, mince pies, plum puddings, apples, oranges, pears, chestnuts, and cakes.

The Victorians loved exotic fruit. They imported oranges and lemons all year round from Spain and tangerines from Tangiers. The expense meant that only the rich could afford them for their table.

London underclass

Life for the underclass in London was less pleasant than in the countryside. The city was dirty, noisy, smelly and unhealthy, with black mud clogging the streets. A yellow fog of pollution, the notorious "pea-souper," often prevented the Londoner from seeing the hand in front of his face, and it provided perfect cover for thieves.

Poor Londoners lived in cramped lodging-houses, sharing rooms and even beds. The Central Criminal Court, The Old Bailey, records many instances of Londoners turning a blind eye and deaf ear to quarrels, domestic violence and even to murder.

Photography

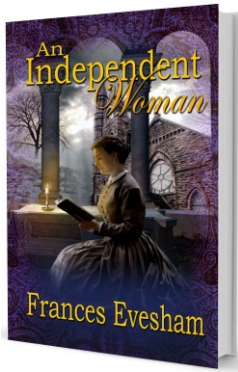
The Victorians enjoyed the novelty of photography. Fox Talbot, in 1841, patented a process that produced more than one copy of a photograph. As each exposure required the sitter to remain motionless for half a minute, many Victorian photographs seem stiff and posed. Photography was a new passion, and the wealthy were keen to immortalise themselves, even if one of their family members had died. This led to a practice, strange to our modern sensibilities, of taking post-mortem photographs.

Members of the Metropolitan Police Force, called "bobbies" after Sir Robert Peel, Home Secretary at the time, policed London from 1829. Outside the capital, most parishes had only a single constable, who kept order as best he could. Serious crimes like murder were punished by hanging, while lesser crimes could result in deportation to Australia or New Zealand, or imprisonment in the notorious Newgate Gaol.

Frances Evesham Novels

If you've enjoyed these short descriptions of some of the trials of the Victorian era, you might enjoy The Thatcham Hall Mysteries.

Mystery fiction set in the 19th century.



An Independent Woman



Danger at Thatcham Hall

Contemporary Crime

Classic crime fiction

In addition to Victorian crime stories, I write a series of Agatha Christie style murder mysteries set in Exham on Sea, a small seaside town in Somerset. If you love cosy mysteries, classic crime, clever animals and cake, try:

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Murder at the Lighthouse

Murder on the Levels

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Murder at the Cathedral

All books available from **Amazon**

About me...

I write mystery stories: the Exham on Sea contemporary crime series set in a small Somerset seaside town, and the Thatcham Hall Mysteries, 19th Century historical mystery romances set in Victorian England.

I collect grandsons, Victorian ancestors and historical trivia, like to smell the roses, lavender and rosemary, and cook with a glass of wine in one hand and a bunch of chillies in the other. I love the Arctic Circle and the equator and plan to visit the penguins in the south one day, when I've knitted enough woolly jumpers.

I've been a speech therapist and a road sweeper and worked in the criminal courts. Now, I walk in the country, breathe sea air and think about murder in Somerset.

Come and pay me a visit: **Website**

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