The Lady, or the Tiger? A Musical
Adapted from Frank Stockton’s short story
by Gerald P. Murphy
THE LADY, OR THE TIGER? - A MUSICAL
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Cast of Characters

Princess – King’s daughter
Cato – her lover
Lady Gelosia – enemy of the princess
King – tyrant of the land
Sniff – courtier
Snoot - courtier
Brash – herald
Blare - herald
Ward – guard
Fenster – guard
Baker – town person
Weaver – town person
Miller – town person
Tailor – town person
Town people – as many as desired
Song 1: “Prologue to The Lady or the Tiger?"  

Solo. (Sings) Once upon a time ago lived a tyrant of this land!  
He was quite severe and he ruled by fear and a bloody iron hand!  
Yet it cannot be denied that he had a gentle side!  
He could bring you joy or he might destroy;  
It’s the tiger or the bride!  
He could bring you joy or he might destroy;  
It’s the tiger or the bride!  

Chorus. (Sings, repeating verse)  

(Curtain opens to Princess talking to her lover, Cato. Cato is rubbing his knee. The set includes green bushes upstage left and right.)  

Princess. Does it still hurt?  
Cato. Just a little. But no matter the pain, it’s always worth it.  
Princess. You know, you don’t have to climb over the back wall to see me. You can always use the main gate.  
Cato. The main gate has too many eyes. I can accept the occasional scraped knee, but if your father caught me coming in the main gate, it might be my life!  
Princess. Ah, but that’s your choice! If you truly loved me, you would use the direct method, through the front gate, no matter what the consequences!  
Cato. If I truly loved you? You mean you have any doubts? I can’t even imagine the tortures your father would put me through if he ever caught me with you, yet here I am once again putting my life in jeopardy to see you once again!  
Princess. Shall I kiss the little scratch on your knee till you are all better?  
Cato. My knee cannot kiss you back! But my lips await you as always!  
Princess. You are such a poet!  
Cato. (Pulling out a sheet of paper) Which reminds me, here is my latest offering to you!  
Princess. Oh, wonderful, Cato, wonderful!  
Cato. My love for you is like the finest silk
That sits upon the altar in a church.
My love for you is pure and clean, like milk.
It sings just like a parrot on a perch!
My love for you is happy like a feast
Where fancy foods and drinks are served all day!
My love for you is like the moon in June
Reflected in the waters of a bay!
And I will love you till the end of time!
And I will never be untrue to you!
I worship you and it would be a crime
If you don’t tell me that you love me, too!
So let me add, with true love’s emphasis,
Let’s end this sonnet with a soothing kiss! (They kiss, but part quickly because they hear a noise offstage right.)

**Princess.** Do you hear that?

**Cato.** Someone comes! We must away lest we be discovered! (They exit stage left, but Cato accidentally drops his poem before he leaves. Lady Gelosia enters from stage right. She almost misses the poem, then returns to pick it up.)

**Gelosia.** What have we here, a poem? (She scans it briefly.) A sonnet to my love, the Princess. And it is signed by Cato. What a happy accident that this should fall into my hands!

**Song 2: “Somebody Left Me a Clue”**

**Gelosia.** My goodness, what should I do? Somebody left me a clue! Could this be something that I have been waiting for all of life? I’ve always wanted some way to bribe her! Maybe this sonnet will do! I am so happy ‘cause somebody left me a clue!

My goodness, what should I do? Somebody left me a clue!
Could this be something that I have been waiting for all of life?
I need a ticket to change my fortune! Maybe this sonnet will do!
I am so happy ‘cause somebody left me a clue!

My goodness, what should I do? Somebody left me a clue!
Could this be something that I have been waiting for all of life?
I always wanted to bring her down some! Maybe this sonnet will do!
I am so happy ‘cause somebody left me a clue! (She exits just as the king and two courtiers, disguised as beggars, enter stage right.)

**King.** You say you have heard treason against me here in the village square, but where are these plotters now? I see no one here!

**Sniff.** They meet here almost daily, your highness!

**Snoot.** And they whisper against your rule, your Excellency, and they mock your manner of justice!

**King.** What? They attack my grand Lady or the Tiger scheme!

**Sniff.** Yes, oh Rarefied One, they even suggest that there is something barbaric about your method of judging the guilt or innocence of the accused!

**Snoot.** Some even plead for a jury of peers instead of the current method.

**King.** A jury of peers? How would that be better than my method, Sniff?

**Sniff.** You are right, as always, your Wondrousness, but still they whisper! And that is why we dress now as beggars so that you may also hear the treason in their tongues!

**King.** But my method is eminently fair! Instead of a judge or jury deciding guilt or innocence, the accused himself makes the decision. He stands before two doors. Behind one door is the lady. Behind the other is a tiger. If he chooses the door with the lady behind it, he is immediately wedded to the most beautiful woman possible for his standing and status in the community and the wedding takes place immediately amongst great pomp and ceremony!

**Snoot.** I think the other door is what bothers your sceptics!

**King.** But there must be a tiger behind one of the doors! Otherwise it would merely be a choice between Humpty and Dumpty! The trial would lack tension and drama! There can be no Yin without a Yang! What good is sweet without sour? Life without death?

**Sniff.** We know you are correct, your Omnipotence, but some are offended about the way the tiger leaps out of the open door and devours the accused.

**Snoot.** The screams…

**Sniff.** The blood…

**Snoot.** The way the tiger never shows any mercy…
**King.** How else would a man-eating tiger behave, Snoot? It is in the nature of the beast to sink his fangs into his prey. Should the tiger starve for the sake of a guilty man?

**Snoot.** Of course not, your All-powerfulness! Your system of justice is the envy of the civilized world. But even a perfect system will have those whisperers and naysayers to undermine your wisdom! And that as why Sniff and I…

**Sniff.** Your humble servants!

**Snoot.** That is why Sniff and I sniff about the land to uncover those who would speak against you!

**King.** Some of the townsfolk are coming now. Let us sit with our beggar cups and hear what is said about me! (Baker, Weaver, Miller and Tailor enter stage right, ignoring the beggars.)

**Baker.** It’s not fair, I tell you! It’s not fair!

**Weaver.** It’s perfectly fair, Baker! What could be fairer?

**Miller.** And it really isn’t our decision. It’s the king’s.

**Baker.** It’s a matter of ethics, Miller! I say what the king is doing isn’t ethical!

**King.** Alms for the poor! Alms for the poor!

**Weaver.** Not now, beggar! Can’t you see we’re busy!

**Tailor.** Are we still on the Lady or the Tiger debate?

**Baker.** Of course, we are! And we’ll stay on this as long as the king’s lunacy continues!

**Miller.** Be careful! Not so loud! The walls have ears!

**Baker.** *(Quieter)* You think it is right that every major criminal faces the same penalty?

**Weaver.** I think it’s not our business.

**Baker.** It’s the duty of every citizen…

**Weaver.** Get off the soapbox, Baker!

**Baker.** It’s the duty of every citizen to participate fully in the life we share as a family, community and society!

**Miller.** You sound as if you’re reading from a textbook!

**Baker.** What the king is doing doesn’t help society; he harms society!

**Miller.** Wait a minute! Wait a minute! Since the king started the Lady or the Tiger system, the crime rate has never been lower!

**Baker.** Because we’re all afraid to face the tiger!
**Miller.** I’m not saying that I want to be eaten by a tiger, but I think his approach produces the greatest balance of good over harm. It’s tough on the bad guys, but it helps keep the peace!

**Baker.** But you’re giving up your sacred rights to a madman!

**King.** Alms for the poor! Alms for the poor!

**Baker.** Shut up, beggar! We’re busy!

**Miller.** Some of the king’s enemies are terrorists! I’d gladly give up some of my freedoms to win protection from these killers!

**Baker.** But the king’s answer doesn’t always protect us.

**Tailor.** I have to agree with Baker here. Sometimes innocent people get the tiger. Sometimes absolute monsters are set free and some poor innocent woman is forced to marry him on the spot. I’m in favour of peace, but I’m not sure the king has the right answer.

**Miller.** What is fair doesn’t matter. Every system has its flaws. Do you really think our old system of trial by jury worked any better? Any fairer?

**Baker.** What makes you say this?

**Miller.** Juries were tampered with. Judges were paid off. Corrupt police made false charges. Innocence and guilt were based on money or social standing. At least here the accused has a fifty-fifty chance, no matter how poor he is.

**Weaver.** You remember how the rich and powerful were always getting off with a slap on the hand, no matter how grievous the crime? At least the king’s system doesn’t favour the rich!

**Baker.** His system favours insanity!

**King.** Alms for the poor! Alms for the poor!

**Tailor.** Give the fool a coin!

**Weaver.** *(Drops a coin in cup.)* Anything to shut him up!

**Miller.** Do you see the way the trials are handled? It’s a regular three-ring circus! All that’s missing is the dancing bear! Why should choosing the right door determine your fate? This is a totally illogical way to decide justice!

**Tailor.** Say what we may, the king’s way is the king’s way! Nothing we say or do will change that!

**Song 3: "He Means to Do Well"**
**Baker.** (Sings.) He’s just a beast! Upon us he must feast! To rules us, he’s not qualified! I say it’s time this ruler died! So let’s rebel and bid the king farewell!

**Miller.** (Sings.) Yet the king has a side sentimental, transcendental, and quite gentle! And his vassals should not be judgemental, for I’m sure that he means to do well!

**Tailor.** (Sings.) He brings us pain! His justice is insane! And here’s a fact you can’t ignore! That tiger lurks behind the door! So let’s rebel and bid the king farewell!

**Weaver.** (Sings.) Yet the king has a side that is gracious, and vivacious, and sagacious! Though at times he might seem quite pugnacious, yet I’m sure that he means to do well!

**Miller.** Maybe it shouldn’t be that way! Maybe the king shouldn’t have so much power! Maybe we don’t need a king!

**Sniff.** (Dropping disguise with others.) And maybe we should have your head cut off and fed to the dogs!

**Snoot.** And maybe you should be placed on the rack and tortured before we have you boiled in oil!

**Miller.** Oh, please, we meant no harm! This was only a philosophical discussion!

**Weaver.** We are but poor workers with no influence, oh Rarefied One! We are as feathers before the mighty hurricane of your power!

**King.** You two (pointing toward Miller and Weaver) will not face my wrath, since you both saw the wisdom of my justice. But the baker and the tailor are different stories. Which is it, Baker, heads or tails?

**Baker.** Heads or tails?

**King.** I’m flipping a coin. Do you choose heads or tails? Only one of you will face my justice. The other will be as free as the miller and the weaver.

**Baker.** I choose heads.

**King.** (Flipping a coin.) Heads you win, tails you face my justice. It’s tails.

**Weaver.** Oh, thank you, oh Merciful One!

**Baker.** I lose?

**King.** Not necessarily. But let me put this to you. Do you want me now to use my system of justice or yours? Under your system there would be a speedy trial by jury, the jury would find you guilty, and I
would have your head. Under my system, you might die, torn apart by a terrible tiger, but you might also be rewarded with a lovely wife and future happiness.

**Baker.** I take your system, oh Exalted One!

**King.** A wise decision.

**Snoot.** And is there now any further discussion of the king’s method of justice?

**Weaver.** No, my lord, we are in complete agreement!

**Miller.** I never doubted the wisdom of His Mightiness!

**Tailor.** Who are we to cast aspersions on a perfectly just and merciful system?

**King.** Take the baker to the arena for the trial, Snoot and Sniff!

**Snoot.** Yes, your Augustness!

**King.** Choose wisely, Baker, and you will have great happiness! Choose poorly, and your fate is in the claws of the tiger! *(All exit stage right. Princess enters from stage left and sits on bench, reading a piece of paper. When Lady Gelosia enters from stage right, Princess calls to her.)*

**Princess.** Please come here. I need to study my Spanish for a shopping trip I will be taking soon to Madrid. These are words dealing with clothing I intend to buy. Help me study them, Lady Gelosia! *(Princess hands her vocabulary words and Gelosia slips the poem behind the Spanish sheet.)*

**Gelosia.** A shopping trip to Spain! That sounds exciting! Perhaps I could accompany you, Princess?

**Princess.** I’m afraid not, Lady Gelosia! I hope to buy the latest fashions there to dazzle everyone at the next ball. It would hardly do to have you in Madrid buying the same outfits!

**Gelosia.** But it matters little how you dress, Princess. I’m sure all the young men would fawn over you even if you wore beggar’s rags!

**Princess.** That might be true, but I still need your help with this vocabulary!

**Gelosia.** El vestido.

**Princess.** That means dress, doesn’t it?

**Gelosia.** You are correct, Princess. Las medias.

**Princess.** Stockings?

**Gelosia.** Correct. Las sandalias.
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**Princess.** That’s easy. Sandals.
**Gelosia.** El bolso.
**Princess.** Camisole?
**Gelosia.** Close, Princess, but not correct. El bolso is a handbag.
**Princess.** So what is a camisole?
**Gelosia.** That’s el bustillo!
**Princess.** A camisole is el bustillo! I’ll have to remember that. Any more words there?
**Gelosia.** Yes, but not in Spanish!
**Princess.** What do you mean?
**Gelosia.** *I mean I have words like this.*

*And I will love you till the end of time!*
*And I will never be untrue to you!*
*I worship you and it would be a crime*
*If you don’t tell me that you love me, too!*
*So let me add, with true love’s emphasis,*
*Let’s end this sonnet with a soothing kiss!*

**Princess.** Give me that poem! I order you to give it to me at once!
**Gelosia.** Certainly, Princess. But it is not the original. The original is signed by your lover, Cato
**Princess.** How dare you! I could have you jailed!
**Gelosia.** More to the point, I could have your lover imprisoned and put on trial. Perhaps your Cato would meet the tiger!
**Princess.** What do you want of me?
**Gelosia.** Perhaps the princess would take me to Spain with her?
**Princess.** To Spain?
**Gelosia.** I love your taste in clothing. Perhaps you could buy me some nice outfits for the ball?
**Princess.** This is blackmail!
**Gelosia.** Is that what they call it? I prefer a gentler word. Let’s just call this my little insurance policy.
**Princess.** I hate you, Gelosia! I hate you more than life itself!
**Gelosia.** Do you hate me more than you love Cato? You could easily dispense with me, but then my letter would go directly to the king!
**Princess.** Why would the king be angry with Cato?
**Gelosia.** For having the presumption to be your lover! He is not nobility. If I remember correctly, his mother was a scullery maid.
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**Princess.** His background means nothing to me!
**Gelosia.** But it means everything to the king! So, will you take me to Spain with you and buy me el vestido and las medias, and las sandalias?
**Princess.** I would never take you…
**Gelosia.** Don’t be loco, Princess, or you will lose your lover!
**Princess.** Never!
**Gelosia.** And behind one of the doors is the tiger! El tigre, Senorita!
**Princess.** Will this be your last request?
**Gelosia.** Certainly, Princess. After our little shopping spree, I’ll return the original. No need for your father to ever see it!
**Princess.** Do you speak the truth?
**Gelosia.** Es verdad! It is the truth! And now I must leave you. I have many preparations to make before I can join you on your trip to Madrid. Adios! (Gelosia exits gently laughing stage left.)

**Song 4. “There Must Be A Way!”**

**Princess.** (Sings.) 
There must be a way for me to slip from her grip. 
_There must be a way! Oh, she must pay! There must be a way!_
What could it be? _I must be free!_
I swear that there must be a way! 
She lives on my misery, so happy and fancy free. 
I feel like a rat in a trap! 
The feeling is new to me! My future has no guarantee! 
And I’m feeling just like a sap! 
_There must be a way for her to fall! Oh, the gall!_
_There must be a way! Oh, she must pay! There must be a way!_
What could it be? _I must be free!_
I swear that there must be a way! 
I acted so carelessly and now I am up a tree! 
I can’t believe I was so dumb! 
She pounced on my poetry and now despite my pedigree, 
My future is looking so glum! 
_There must be a way! I have to fight this parasite!_
_There must be a way to make her pay! There must be a way!_
No time to act shy. _This girl must fry!_
I need a solution for my persecution
I swear that there must be a way! (The Princess rushes off stage right crying aloud. Curtain or lights down. At rise, the crowned king sits on upstage centre throne. To his left a mitred bishop stands prepared if there is a wedding. Sniff and Soot stand to king’s right. The heralds Brash and Blare stand at attention downstage centre. Other townsfolk stand upstage left and right while the baker and two guards kneel before the king.)

**Brash.** All rise now for the case of the baker versus the king!

**Blare.** The baker stands accused of treason to king and country!

**Brash.** The trial’s outcome shall be determined by the accused!

**Blare.** Behind one of the large metal doors to the left and right of the throne room, a tiger lies waiting to prove the guilt of the baker!

**Brash.** Behind the other door is the lovely seamstress, soon to be made bride of the accused should he prove himself innocent by choosing the door of the bride.

**King.** The choosing shall now begin. Guards, accompany the prisoner to the choosing spot! (The guards accompany the baker to a spot downstage centre, then they both move to their guard stations stage left and right. The baker shakes with fear as he glances left and right trying in vain to determine the correct door.)

**Baker.** Both doors are identical. How am I to choose?

**King.** Fate does the choosing. You merely point the finger!

**Baker.** Is there a time limit to this?

**King.** (Imperiously.) The time is now. Make your choice, Baker! (The king exits.)

**Baker.** (Closing his eyes.) I choose…I choose…this door! (Pointing stage left. Immediately bells ring and clang continuously. The seamstress appears stage left. She and the baker embrace. The bishop runs before them, book in hand.)

**Bishop.** Friends, we have been invited here today to share with the baker and the seamstress a very important moment in their lives. In the few seconds they have been together, their love and understanding of each other has grown and matured, and now they have decided to live their lives together as husband and wife. And so, I now pronounce you man and wife. You may kiss the bride! (The baker and seamstress kiss briefly.)
Song 5: “Wedding Song"

Seamstress. (Sings.) We were so worried the tiger would bite! But we found true love, and ev’rything’s right! The king is a jolly fellow! He knows what is best! Instead of a tiger’s dinner We’re feeling so blessed! We were so worried the tiger would bite! But we found true love, and ev’rything is right! Yeah! (Baker and seamstress and are immediately led off stage left with the crowd cheering and laughing loudly.)

Bishop. This way to the wedding reception! This way to love and peace and wedded bliss! There will be champagne and cake for all!

Weaver. Excellent choice, Baker! Excellent choice!

Miller. Bravo, Baker! Bravo! (All exit stage right. After the cheering and laughter die down, Lady Gelosia enters stage left, followed a bit later by the king entering stage right.)

Gelosia. Is that you, your majesty? (Entering from stage right.)

King. It’s me all right, or my twin brother.

Gelosia. I didn’t know you had a twin brother.

King. No, all I have is a daughter, the princess. I’m sure you’ve met her.

Gelosia. Yes, I have, my lord.

King. In fact, you recently made a trip with her to Madrid.

Gelosia. Yes, my lord.

King. I wasn’t aware that you were such great friends.

Gelosia. We weren’t, my lord.

King. But my daughter took you along anyway.

Gelosia. Yes, my lord.

King. And bought you clothing.

Gelosia. Yes, my lord.

King. Lots of clothing.

Gelosia. Yes, my lord.

King. I know my daughter very well. She is many things, but she would never be called generous.
**Gelosia.** Is there a problem, your Majesty?
**King.** I thought to myself, why would my daughter, who is not known for her generosity, suddenly become generous to a person she doesn’t even particularly like?
**Gelosia.** People can change, my lord.
**King.** Not my daughter. She was born selfish and she will remain selfish all her life.
**Gelosia.** Yes, my lord.
**King.** Is there something you want to show me?
**Gelosia.** My lord?
**King.** Don’t play games with me. You are blackmailing my daughter. What do you have on her?
**Gelosia.** *(Shows king the poem.)* Just this poem, My lord.
**King.** *(Scanning poem.)* Is this to my daughter?
**Gelosia.** Yes, my lord.
**King.** And that name on the bottom?
**Gelosia.** That is Cato, my lord. Her lover.
**King.** Her lover? The scullery maid’s son presumes to become my daughter’s lover?
**Gelosia.** Cato is very attractive, my lord. There is no woman in your kingdom who could resist his many charms.
**King.** And that includes you?
**Gelosia.** Yes, my lord.
**King.** Guards! Guards! *(Ward and Fenster enter and kneel before the king.)*
**Ward.** At your service, your majesty!
**Fenster.** Your wish is our command!
**King.** Do you know Cato?
**Ward.** Yes, my lord.
**King.** Arrest him immediately! Tell him the trial will commence at noon tomorrow!
**Fenster.** We will do so immediately, my lord! *(Fenster and Ward exit and Gelosia kneels before the king.)*
**Gelosia.** Am I to die, my lord?
**King.** What?
**Gelosia.** Am I to die?
**King.** Of course, not Gelosia. You did me a great service. You helped end this young upstart’s affair with my daughter.

**Gelosia.** Then what is to be done with me?

**King.** Behind one door will be a tiger tomorrow. You will be behind the other door!

**Gelosia.** And if Cato chooses my door?

**King.** You will be his wife.

**Gelosia.** Thank you, my lord! You have made me very happy!

**King.** Do you love this Cato?

**Gelosia.** Yes, my lord.

**King.** Then tomorrow will be very important to you, whichever door he chooses.

**Gelosia.** Yes, my lord.

**King.** Go now to see Sniff, my courtier. He will make all the arrangements for your part in the trial.

**Gelosia.** *(Ecstatic.)* Bless you, my lord! *(Gelosia exits.)*

**King.** What a despicable woman she is! It’s really too bad she couldn’t spend some time wrestling with the tiger! Oh, well, either door will save my daughter from involvement with that knavish Cato. That is all I want, and I always get what I desire! *(King exits stage left just as Snoot enters stage right with Ward.)*

**Ward.** We’re having some problems with the tiger, sir.

**Snoot.** Was he disappointed he missed out on eating the baker?

**Ward.** I think so, my lord. He seems very petulant.

**Snoot.** Feed him some scraps before the trial begins. We don’t like him so hungry that he just devours the accused immediately. We want him to toy with the victim a bit. The audience always adores it when the cat plays with his food!

**Ward.** Yes, my lord!

**Snoot.** And don’t forget to remind the bishop that he has a possible wedding today at noon.

**Ward.** *(Exiting stage right.)* Yes, my lord!

**Snoot.** *(To himself as Princess enters stealthily from stage right.)* Sniff has the easy job getting the bride ready for the trial. Why was I assigned the tiger! If people only knew how difficult the life of a courtier is. They probably think all we do is lie about on cushions eating chocolate-covered strawberries.
Princess. You should be given a medal for all your hard work, Snoot!
Snoot. Oh, you startled me!
Princess. Hope you don’t mind my giving myself a backstage tour of your torture chambers.
Snoot. The king would frown on this, Princess. Especially since you have a personal stake in the outcome of this trial.
Princess. It would be beneath me to try to discover the secret of the door. However, a rumour has been circulating that Lady Gelosia might be behind one of the doors.
Snoot. Isn’t she the one you took to Madrid?
Princess. Yes, that’s the one. Is there any truth to this rumour?
Snoot. I suppose it wouldn’t hurt to tell you. It’s not really a state secret. Yes, Lady Gelosia is the possible bride to be.
Princess. And if Cato picks her door?
Snoot. Wedding bells will ring! I hear that Lady Gelosia already has a crush on the young gentleman. This would cause quite the sensation. Of course, I mean no disrespect to your position, Princess, but such an outcome would be a real crowd-pleaser.
Princess. Are you paid enough, Snoot?
Snoot. Do you mean does the king give me what I deserve? Well, I’m paid, but never enough to even cover my expenses.
Princess. Someday, when the current king passes away, I’ll be in charge of this kingdom.
Snoot. I’m aware of that.
Princess. I intend to be much more generous with my courtiers than the current king.
Snoot. Is that true, kind lady?
Princess. But of course, all of this will happen in the distant future. You probably could use more money right now, when you need it most!
Snoot. Absolutely, Princess!
Princess. (Showing Snoot a bag of gold.) How many gold pieces would it take to make you happy, Snoot?
Snoot. I imagine just ten coins would put a smile on my face!
Princess. How many pieces would it take to reveal the secret of the door?
Snoot. Oh, that’s a different story, Princess. Revealing that secret might cost me my life.
Princess. Then how many pieces would it take for you to take that chance?
Snoot. At least thirty pieces, Princess.
Princess. (Handing Snoot the bag.) Here are fifty gold coins, more than you earn in ten years.
Snoot. I never did believe the rumour that you were not generous!
Princess. And what door has the tiger? (Snoot whispers answer in her ear.)

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