

LINKED LIVES.

By Lady Gertrude Douglas.

CHAPTER XII.

"WILL YOU WALK INTO MY PARLOR? SAID THE SPIDER TO THE FLY."

"Touch the goblet no more - I will make thy heart sore To its very core! Its perfume is the breath Of the Angel of Death. And the light that within it lies Is the flash of his evil eyes. Beware - oh! beware! For sickness, sorrow and care - All are there!" - Longfellow.

The month of September is drawing to a close, and Katie Mackay is still in the service of Mrs. Royson. But what is the change which has come over her?—for a change there is most certainly. Look at her, as she sits idly, with her arms crossed, on one of the farm-house doorsteps, a basket of stockings, all waiting to be darned, resting unheeded by her side. What is she about?—what makes her look so dull, so dispirited? and why is she neglecting her work, with which she is already sufficiently behind-hand?

The fact is—Katie, ever since her unfortunate meeting with Jeanie Kerr, has been growing more and more dissatisfied with the thralldom of service. Jeanie has, it is true, made several ineffectual overtures to her; but Katie, while resisting them, has done so with slackened energy. Although she has no desire to be again as she was formerly, she has too easily persuaded herself that there can be no harm in taking a little more amusement.

Towards the beginning of September, however, Jeanie, with all her set, disappeared suddenly from Glasgow. This departure, while removing Katie for a time from dangerous influences, had by no means left her in safety. She became irritable, moody, and at times exceedingly careless over her work; nor was even Steenie's devoted attention able to distract her silly little heart from the foolish fancy after which, ever since the acquaintance with Cameron, it had gone roving. She had seen him again—more than once too—with Jeanie. He had flattered her by his very marked display of admiration—had even offered to "treat" her to the theatre,—that temptation had been a very great one—so great that she had almost yielded to it. Poor Katie!—she could not forget that it was the last chance she had had, for after her refusal she did not see him again, and she believed that he was irretrievably affronted, and would never speak to her any more.

"I dinna ken what this that's come ower ye, lassie," says Mrs. Royson's voice behind her, speaking in a high tone of displeasure; "ye're no the same lassie at a' that ince ye war. Ye are that idle! I's no intendin' to put up wi' it nae mair. I sud like fine to ken wha's to do the work o' the house if ye sit like an idle quean a-speerin' intil the heavens?"

An angry flush mantles in Katie's cheek, but upon hearing her mistress's voice she rises silently.

"What's the matter wi' ye, lassie? Ye're daein' naethin' at a'," pursues Mrs. Royson, still very irate.

"I so wearit," responds Katie, briefly.

"Hoots! lassie, ye've had naught to weary ye; ye're jist idle. But I can tell ye a thing, an' that it's nae guid ye're sae muckle ta'en up wi'—ye'd best min' yersel', Katie."

Off hurries Mrs. Royson, while Katie slowly takes up the neglected stockings.

Later on in the evening she has to go into Glasgow—one of the children is ill, and the doctor has ordered some physic, which must be had from the town before night. Katie is sent on the errand, with many reiterated recommendations from her mistress not to loiter on the road, but to return as quickly as possible.

Off starts Katie, nothing loath to enjoy the air; it is infinitely more amusing to be walking into Glasgow than to be employed over indoor avocations especially on a beautiful September evening.

Having obtained the medicine from the chemist, and loitered just a very little, looking in at the shop windows, Katie turns her face homewards, and has almost cleared the town when, coming towards her from the opposite direction, she beholds the well-known figure of Jeanie Kerr, alone, and walking hurriedly, looking eagerly about her, as though she were expecting to meet some one on the way.

Now Jeanie has seen Katie before Katie sees her, but for some reason best known to herself, Jeanie pretends not to observe her, and actually brushes past Katie, with her head turned away.

Shall she let her pass? The thought flashes through Katie's mind, but, alas! she pays no heed to it, and, turning at once upon her heel, she calls out, hesitatingly—

"Jeanie!"

"Katie!" responds the other instantly, with a well-feigned start of surprise.

"Did ye no see me?" inquires Katie.

"Och! lassie, dinna put yersel' aboot—it's no me that's wantin' ye. Yer mither is lyin' awfu' bad, an' she's aye cryin' efter ye. Ye surely wanna be sae hard-hearted as no to gang till her yince mair!"

"Me mither! What ails her, Jeanie?"

"She's sick—jist awfu' sick,—an' like to dee. I dinna ken if ye will be in time to get seein' her, but, puir body! she gies us nae peace. Maggie's clane demented wi' her; it's aye Katie she's cryin' efter. Ye'll surely no refuse to come an' see her, an' her sae sick?"

"I dinna ken," begins Katie, in a sorely perplexed voice. "Is fear! I'll no can win till her. Whaur's my mither bidin'?"

"No in Glaskie—she's in Edinburgh. It'll no tak' ye lang, lassie, gin ye've a mind to gang. We'll get a train the night, an' ye wad be hame airly the next mornin'—its jist chapit seven. Wull we catch the eight o'clock train?"

"Na, na," answers Katie, with a decided shake of the head. "I daurna gang wantin' Mistress Royson's leave. I maun gang hame an' ax her can she do wantin' me."

"I tell her yer mither war sick—she wull ken fine whaur ye're gaein'. Och! Katie, dinna be sae crabblie. Gin ye dinna haste ye'll be owre late, ye'll no win to see yer puir mither alive. Tak' me advice noo, ah' come richt awa'!"

Katie hesitates; she does not really care much about her mother, though she has not seen for many years, but her naturally warm heart cannot bear the thought that her mother should be dying and calling after her in vain. Still she knows that to go away with Jeanie, without her mistress's leave, will be tantamount to losing her situation. Mrs. Royson will never be persuaded to look over such a liberty—especially in her present dissatisfied frame of mind. Turned out of her place, where can she go? She will be once more adrift upon the wide world, for Mrs. Royson, if very angry, will probably refuse to give her a character, and Katie is not prepared to face such consequences. The result of these reflections is, that Katie, after a very short demur, answers resolutely.

"Is no gaein' wi' ye, Jeanie; ye needna gang for to try to get me persuaded. Ye can gang awa' back till Edinburgh, an' tell me mither that maybe I'll get a day to mysel' afore lang; sae guid night to ye, Jeanie; an' I's muckle obliged to ye for yer trouble."

With this Katie turns away abruptly, and, deaf to any further remonstrances from Jeanie, sets off at a quick run towards home. Long before reaching it, however, she has made up her mind to ask for a holiday, that she may go and see her mother. Mrs. Royson will surely not refuse so reasonable a request; and Katie feels quite certain that it is her duty to make it. If possible she will get leave for the following day—it will be better, so thinks Katie. Jeanie will not expect her so soon, and will not be looking out for her. She can go by an early train, have several hours in Edinburgh, and be back in plenty of time early in the evening.

Mrs. Royson makes no objection to the proposal, but instantly accedes to Katie's request. She is a good-hearted woman, and her warmest sympathies are aroused by the mention of the sick mother. She only stipulates that Katie shall on no account prolong her absence beyond the evening.

Katie promises faithfully, and by daybreak she is up, ready to start. There are several things to be done before she can get away, and to her extreme annoyance, in spite of all her hurrying, she misses the first train into Edinburgh. She then remembers, too, that Jeanie Kerr did not give her her mother's address. This is a most perplexing discovery—what can she do? She does not know where the Kerrs are living; and even had she done so, the going to them was the very danger she had desired to avoid. Katie feels inclined to sit down and have a good cry. Everything seems to be conspiring against her—she has tried so hard to do well, to keep out of bad company, she has resisted so much temptation already, and now, the only course left to her is to try and find out the Kerr's address from Steenie Logie. He knows where they live—Katie remembers having heard him say so on one occasion when, in his presence, they had been the subject of conversation between herself and Lizzie.

So she turns reluctantly away from the station, and retraces her steps towards the street in which the Logies live. Lizzie has already gone to work, and Steenie is (so his mother informs Katie) busy down on the quay. He belongs to one of the steam-packets that this is his day for Belfast—he is always absent three days each week, and he has left the house scarcely "half an hour since," remarks Mrs. Logie, with a distrustful glance at Katie, to whom she has taken a somewhat unjust dislike; "he'll no be back afore Saturday—ye needna come speerin' efter him lassie."

"Och! botheration! It's nae yer son I's wantin'," Mistress Logie, answers Katie impatiently; "dinna fash yer heid aboot that, wumman. It's jist something I wad like to ken, and I thought, maybe, he might hae told me. An' I wull hae it too, in spite o' the auld boss!" continues angry Katie, with a toss of her pretty little head, as she sets off down the street towards the Broomielaw, where she thinks she will have a chance of finding Steenie.

She is right in her conjecture, for the boat does not leave for the next

two hours, and Steenie is quietly smoking his pipe on the quay, close to the place of embarkation. Katie wishes that his mother could have seen his start of pleasure, and the sudden rush of color which the sudden sight of her calls forth into his honest countenance. The pleased expression, so soon as he learns Katie's errand, however, gives place to one of extreme dismay, and Steenie's brow darkens with a cloud of distrust.

"Ye're surely no awa' to Edinburgh, Katie? What's this ye are wantin' wi' the Kerrs? It's surely no possible ye are gaein' to visit them?"

"Deed and I wull," says Katie obstinately; "an' I wad like fine to ken wha's I's wantin'—it's my mither. Maister Steenie Logie!"

"Eh, Katie, lassie, dinna be so crabblie. Ye ken fine it's no interferin' ye ken fine what I wad say gin I might; but I beg o' ye dinna hae dealin' wi' them Kerrs. Ye sud ken best yersel' what ken o' fowk they are."

Steenie's tone is almost beseeching, and its tenderness is unmistakable. Katie is touched, but determined not to show it.

"Dinna bother, Steenie; it's nae the Kerrs I's wantin'—it's my mither. Here Katie recounts what the reader already knows, but Steenie seems by no means reassured.

"I cud swear it's a lee, Katie. Ye canna trust them Kerrs—they are deceiving ye, I cud take me oath tillt."

"Ye didna tell me ye ken them sae weel," says Katie, with a saucy, sly glance up at Steenie's flushed face. "Dear me, Maister Steenie," she continues scornfully, "it's weel seen ye've had muckle to do wi' e'en yersel'."

"Bide a wee, Katie," answers Steenie emphatically;—"I can assure ye ye're rash judgin' me. I yince ken that fellow Cameron—to my cost, as I telt ye afore—but for them Kerrs, I niver keppt company wi' ony o' them."

"Hoo ken ye whaur they bided?" inquires Katie briskly.

"Ye havena gien me time to tell ye, lassie," replies Steenie reproachfully. "It war a' thru' yon Cameron I happint to hear tell on't. He grippit haid o' me airm ae evenin', an' wad hae had me gang along wi' him, to some place o' amusement. I wadna gang wi' him, Katie, sae he went on awfu' at me, and ca'd me for a' the fules in Glaskie; an' he gied me, wi' ony invitation, the address whaur I wad find him in Edinburgh gin me mind changt it. That's hoo I kenit whaur them Kerrs bided."

"Is no heedit," answers Katie, with an ill-assumed indifference, for the mention of Cameron has set her heart beating more quickly than usual. "But haste ye, Maister Steenie. I havena ony mair time to waste. I maun be off. It's no lang I's gotten to get seein' my puir mither. Wha kens if I wull fin' her alive?"

"Wha kens if the story be true?" says Steenie anxiously. "They Kerrs—"

"Wull ye haud yer tongue, Maister Steenie? It's nae yer advice I'm askin'. Can ye no gie a coevil answer, mair? D'ye ken whaur the Kerrs bide, or d'ye no ken?"

"Fine I ken it; but I's no willin' to gie ye, Katie Mackay."

"Siccan impudence!" says Katie, now thoroughly angry. "Weel, then, I wish ye guid mornin', Maister Steenie Logie, an' ye'll no catch me askin' a favor frae ye ony mair."

Poor Steenie! it is hard for him, and no wonder if his anxiety to please Katie gets the better of his prudence. He watches her retreating figure for a few seconds, but, when she is about to turn round the corner of the street, he utters a hasty exclamation, and a few rapid strides bring him alongside of her.

Katie turns upon him fiercely, her eyes full of angry defiance.

"Hoo daur ye follow me that gate? Did I not telt ye I wad hae me mair to do wi' ye? Gang yer ain ways an' dinna fash yersel' aboot me."

"Och! Katie, yer dear Katie!" begins Steenie, with entreating humility, but the indignant young lassie interrupts him sharply.

"Hoo daur ye, hoo daur ye? I'll be obliged to ye in the future to mind yer ain affairs."

"Eh, Katie, dinna look sae disdainfu'! I ken fine I've nae business to be interferin', but hoo ony respectable lassie like yersel' can hae ony dealin' wi' them Kerrs!—weel, weel! But I'll no say ae word mair aboot it, an' gin ye maun ken whaur they bide, I'll telt ye richt awa'! It's number ten or twelve in the street that ca' Rose street, in the new town. Noo er ye satisfied, lassie? Say ye forgive me afore ye gang."

"A' richt," answers Katie, in a mollified tone, slackening her pace, and letting down the corners of her mouth. "Ye sudna vex me, Steenie, yer gar me say sair things to me; ye'er divna telt ye I wadna hae naught to do wi' the Kerrs; it's to see me mither I's gaein'."

Steenie shakes his head.

"Gin they dinna keep ye,—Katie. Wull ye gie me yer promise ye'll come hame the nicht? Say ye promise, Katie!"

"An' I wad like to ken what way that concerns ye, Maister Steenie?" replies Katie, brusquely, a smile lurking meanwhile upon her rosy lips, and this time the dancing light in her blue eyes shows more of mischief than of anger.

They are at the moment passing by a covered archway. Steenie cannot resist the temptation that seizes suddenly upon him. Quick as lightning he flings his arms round Katie's

waist, draws her aside out of the open street, and before she has time to recover from her breathless astonishment, he has held her tightly in his arms, and has snatched a true lover's kiss, just in the very middle of those cherry lips, that have so teased him for the last quarter of an hour.

"Tak' that for yer impudence, Maister Steenie Logie!" exclaims Katie, breaking away from his arms, and administering a smart slap on one side of the fair, curly head, still bent down towards her. "Hoo daur ye, impudent, saucy lad that ye'er."

Steenie looks abashed, but manages to get possession of the punishing hand, and avenges himself by crushing it in his powerful grasp, repeating meanwhile,

"Say ye promise, Katie—say ye'll come hame the nicht."

"What gars ye be askin' sic promises, Maister Steenie? Can ye no min' yer ain affairs, an' leave me to mysel'?"

"Eh, Katie, d'ye no ken yet? D'ye no ken that I luv ye wi' a' my heart? I do so!—I do so!" says Steenie earnestly, his honest eyes filling with tears. "I's nouch but a sair sailor lad, but I luv ye, Katie, an' gin ye'll promise to be my ain bonnie wife ain o' these days, ye'll mak' me like to dee wi' happiness."

"Och! ye're gay fulish, Steenie," replies Katie, in an undertone. She is pleased, nevertheless. What girl could be otherwise, with such a lover as Steenie? But Katie has no true affection for him, though she is flattered by his unaffected admiration. She sees no reason, though, why she should repulse him altogether, so she adds hastily, "I canna bide the noo, I wull miss the train; but gin ye've taen sic a fancy to me, Steenie, I'll no torment ye nae mair, ye may depend. I'll no bide in Edinburgh, I'll be hame the nicht, I gie ye my word, I wull so do it."

With this promise Katie darts off like an arrow in the direction of the station, turning, however, at the top of the street, to see if Steenie is still looking after her. He is, and waves his cap to her, upon which she shakes her head in mock disdain, and with a light heart, and laughing face, full of triumph, she turns the corner and disappears from Steenie's gaze.

"Whaur's my mither, Jeanie?" "So ye've come, after a'! Hooray! I see wull yer siller ear-rings!" "So you have; and there they are to you, Miss Jeanie Kerr. Remember, my share of the bargain is paid."

"Whaur's my mither, Jeanie?" Katie asks the question again, as she stands fully on the threshold of the Kerrs' Edinburgh abode, and gazes distrustfully into the countenances of the two occupants of the parlor.

"Ye mither, lassie," responds an untidy, half-dressed dame, no other than Jeanie Kerr herself, who, when Katie enters, is serving up some species of refreshment to an early visitor.

"Your mother," re-echoes that self-same visitor in the person of Willie Cameron, rising from his seat and going towards the door, not, however, before he has deliberately taken a small cardboard box out of his waistcoat pocket and placed it within Jeanie's eagerly extended hands.

"Your mother is well, and you will see her before the day is out; in the meanwhile welcome to Edinburgh, Katie Mackay."

The evil eyes are upon her; alas! for their perilsous influence. Katie sees instantly that a snare has been laid for her into which she has fallen. If Willie Cameron had not been present, she would have flown into a violent rage; as it is, however, she only says reproachfully,

"Jeanie Kerr, what garred ye tell siccan a lee! It's no ye I's come seekin' in; whaur's my mither?"

"Eh! Katie, it's that proof to see ye," responds Jeanie, clapping her hands, "ye'll soon forgie us the trick we've played ye. It's for yer guid, ye ken; Katie; ye maun be kinna daft to bide awa' frae us a'! Dinna fash yersel' aboot yer mither—she's fine; ye'll see her the nicht, an' Maggie forbye."

"Is no wantin' Maggie; I's no gaein' to bide here, ye fause hypocrit that ye'er, Jeanie Kerr!" begins Katie with a burst of indignation, for, keenly resenting Jeanie's triumphant airs and speeches, she is in no humor to submit to the humiliation of having been duped.

Thanks, nevertheless, to the dangerous influence of Cameron, between whom and Jeanie there has, for some weeks existed a compact, having for its aim the perversion of unhappy Katie, the weak girl allows herself to be induced to forgive, and to take in good part the deception practised upon her credulity. She soon gets over her first anger; mollified, in the first place, by Cameron's attentions, and yielding before long to the intoxicating pleasure which she can no longer conceal from herself, his company affords her. Of her mother, for whose sake she came to Edinburgh, Katie sees nothing; she forgets all about her hour, she learns accidentally that that "estimable parent," whose reminiscences of her youngest child had been so touchingly described by Jeanie's deceitful tongue, is in gaol, where, in fact, during the greater part of the calendar year, she habitually passes her time.

Cameron takes this opportunity of further informing his victim how the plan to decoy her has been the subject of a bet between himself and Miss Jeanie Kerr. The plan having succeeded, Jeanie has won a pair of long-curved earrings, the property of a jeweller in Manchester, who was kindly

relieved without his consent some months ago by Cameron; not only of the said earrings, but of many other superfluities.

Mrs. Royson had limited Katie's leave to 9 o'clock. Katie fully intends to be back at that hour, but as the afternoon wears on, it is thought necessary that Katie's health should be drunk. Mrs. Kerr is very generous of her whiskey—or perhaps somebody else, which is all the same thing in the end. The usual consequences ensue; most of the company take too much and become uproarious.

For a long time Katie refuses her share of the dangerous beverage; she does not like it, and she remembers how often she has been warned not to touch it. By degrees, however, she is half-persuaded, half-shamed into taking just a "wee drop," which wee drop, unaccommodated as she is to spirits, excites her so much that she is easily induced to repeat the experiment, until she becomes drowsy and stupefied, so that when the hour arrives for going to the station, she cannot stand steady upon her feet, and is obliged to lie down on Jeanie's bed.

There, as might have been foreseen, she falls asleep, and sleeps heavily for more than two hours. When she wakes she finds herself alone, the room darkened, and everything quiet. Confused at first, Katie cannot remember where she is, or what has happened; but with returning consciousness comes a sudden pang of terror. What if she has missed the last train to Glasgow? Up she springs, rushing straight into the outer room, where she finds no one but Mrs. Kerr.

"Och! Mistress Kerr, what way did ye let me sleep sae lang?" says Katie, glancing reproachfully at the clock, which is pointing to five minutes to nine—"I sud hae been hame by noo."

"Dinna post yersel' aboot, lassie," replies the stolid matron with great complacency. "I hadna the heart to disturb ye, an' ye sleepin' sae peacefu'. Ye're owre late the nicht, but it will be a' ane gin ye gang wi' the first train in the mornin'."

Duped again! poor Katie!—the hellish bands tightening round you! Have you shut your eyes to your danger? Have you fallen so far since the morning that you can confide in that woman?

Not yet!—not quite yet! The evil spirits are busy round her, but yet again the warning voice of conscience speaks, and once more Katie listens.

"Guid nicht til ye, Mistress Kerr. Maybe I's nae owre late for the nine o'clock train. Onyways, I'll risk it," she exclaims, seizing with sudden energy her little bonnet and her plaid shawl; and, without heeding Mrs. Kerr's remonstrances, she springs down the stairs, and in another moment is running down the street.

Katie, unfortunately, has forgotten the way she came in the morning, and in her excitement takes a wrong turning, loses her way, and has to retrace her steps, thereby wasting some precious minutes.

The station reached at last, she beholds the train puffing alongside of the platform, the whistle sounding, the last bell ringing, and the guard hard at work closing the doors.

"Wull it be the Glaskie train?" inquires the panting girl as she reaches the head of the long flight of stairs leading to the starting platform.

"Ay, lassie—the last train for Glaskie; but ye're owre late, my hinny—she's jist aft."

Pushing past the old grey-headed porter who has vouchsafed this piece of intelligence, Katie bounds forward, running a considerable risk of breaking her neck in her headlong descent on to the platform.

Alas! as she reaches it the train begins to move.

"Oh! bide a wee!—bide a wee, for the Lord's sake! Let me jist win intil her!"

"Your ticket!" shouts the guard, half opening a third-class carriage door.

Then, climax of misfortune! Katie, wicketly trusting her hand into her pocket in search of the little purse where, in the morning, she had safely bestowed the return half of her ticket, finds that it is gone! Gone!—with her ticket, and, worst of all, her quarter's wages, paid to her on the preceding evening by Mrs. Royson.

"Guid save us, it's stolen!" she ejaculates faintly.

The guard shakes his head, closes the half-open door with a peremptory bang, jumps into his own compartment, and the train puffs out of the station.

Katie bursts into tears, despairingly wringing her hands together, attracting considerable attention, not of the most flattering kind, from the bystanders. Some think she is a thief. Her appearance just now, over-heated and breathless as she is by reason of her precipitate flight from Mrs. Kerr's house to the railway station, goes against her. The old porter takes the trouble to come down on the stairs. (Kind old man! maybe he is the father of a pretty daughter himself.)

"Lassie," he says gravely, "had ye no better gang hame to yer mither? Ye'll no get another train the nicht, ye ken. It's no the wull o' Providence that ye sud win intil Glaskie; maybe it's a' for the best."

"It's weel for ye to talk, maister, that hae gotten a hame to gang till," answers Katie, drying her tears, and looking the old man sadly enough in the face. "I's lost my situation wi' that train no waitin'."

"Hoot, lassie! cheer up, it may be nae sae bad as ye imagine. Can ye no tallygraph?"

"Tallygraph!" says Katie, reflectively; then, with a shake of the head, Minard's Liniment cures Burns, &c.

"I've lost my purse—I havna got sae muckle as a penny in a' the world."

At this period of the conversation the old porter is called away, and goes reluctantly, telling Katie to wait his return. Katie sits down upon one of the benches, quite disposed to accept of the protection offered to her; thinking over what she shall say to Mrs. Royson. Perhaps if Mrs. Royson hears the truth she will not be so very hard upon her after all. The difficulty is, where shall she stay for the night? Katie is quite resolved not to return to Mrs. Kerr's; but then, where can she go?

A bright idea strikes her! The old porter may allow her to sit in the waiting-room, or perhaps he may offer her the shelter of his own house. He looks such a kind old man. Katie thinks she will state all the circumstances of her position candidly to him, and she feels sure he will give her his assistance as far as he is able.

"So you have missed the train, have you, after all? What a lark!"

The speaker is, alas! the old porter, but that arch-enemy of Katie's soul, Willie Cameron. He is standing before her, looking dangerously handsome—almost gentlemanly in his appearance. What a beautiful curly head he has! and what magnificent dark eyes! What a very superior lover to poor, humble Steenie!—far as looks go. Katie knows that he is the prime instigator of the plot to detain her in Edinburgh, and yet she glances up into his face and laughs.

"Well, no good waiting here, I suppose," he says carelessly, his eyes meanwhile fixed upon her in a way that sets every nerve in her body tingling. "You can't get to Glasgow to-night, that's certain. Come on, we'll have some fun."

"I dinna ken," begins Katie, faintly demurring. "I maun get the first train in the mornin'. Gin I bide here twad be best maybe."

"Nonsense! plenty of time for that. Come, I want you—we'll go and have a jolly dance, and make Maggie mad."

"Maggie?"

"Yes, Maggie. Don't you know she's daft about me? But there's no girl in England or Scotland I like as well as you, Katie."



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