

R. GARLAND GRAY

PREDESTINED

ONE MORE MOMENT
The Faery Faith Series by
Ms. R. Garland Gray

*BEWARE of spoilers for those who have not read
Predestined, Fey Born and White Fells.*

Spring and birth, the first season of the ten years had come to pass.

In the grouping of sacred oaks beyond the fey fortress Kindred, Derina stood in the dawn mist, an old and bent creature robbed of her youth long ago. Green grasses and black, snarly roots pressed beneath her bare feet. She wore an old, silvery gray gown formed of webs with slightly frayed edges. Except for the green sprigs of rowan woven into her white hair, she looked like vapor and spirit.

Behind her, a small rustle sounded. With empty eye sockets, she looked down and to her right. Within the swirling mist at her ankles, a tiny, black-haired faery sat astride a white rabbit wearing a silver harness. The furry animal hopped forward another step, the tips of its long, floppy, pink ears grazing the ground.

“COME YOU TO SEE THE DARK CHIEFTAIN AND HIS MATE, DERINA?” the piskie asked in a voice too deep for one so small.

Derina lifted her white head and did not answer.



In the gray dawn light, Tynan stood near the stables, disheveled and sleepy-eyed. The all-night meeting with the faery king had been more of an annoyance than anything else. With guarded awareness, he scanned the tall ancient oaks standing beyond the eastern pasture. To his right, a patch of purple flowers had turned the mist into a shade of twilight. It was very early, a gray daybreak full of mystery and mist and new births. He felt her move behind him and turned to his faerymate.

“My heart, ’tis my teacher you sense,” Bryna explained softly.

“The crone?”

Her eyes glittered with faint displeasure, and his lips twitched in mirth.

“Derina would not like you to call her *crone*, Tynan. She is a druidess and has the knowing of many things.”

“I know this.” Hunger for her pulsed inside him, warm and wanting as always. She was his territorial goddess and his heart’s companion.

“Do not let the faery king upset you, Tynan. He had heard the bard’s kingship song naming another war-

rior-chieftain of the *Tuatha Dé Danann*.”

“I willna let it.” He wrapped an arm around her slenderness and pulled her close to his side, her silken hair brushing his bare forearm. “So the crone stands in the mist, does she?”

She tilted her head. “And so you call her crone to annoy her?”

“Aye, I do.” He brushed her soft lips with his. “For her meddling ways,” he murmured, against her swift smile.

But he continued to feel unsettled, and his gaze flicked back once more to the oaks. “The land is serene, but that place feels not.”

Bryna lifted her gaze, too, and felt a slight shiver down her spine. The sacred oaks were awash in the silvery mist of the in-between, a time before night fully relinquished the grasping of air to the light of days. Her silvery gray eyes darkened with thoughtfulness, and she worried about her teacher. Derina had grown very distant, separating herself from life. “I doona know her reasons for staying away. Best to leave her be. My teacher will come when she chooses to come.”

She turned back and found amethyst eyes studying her.

“Do you know something that I doona know, faery?”

Bryna shook her head. She sensed nothing out of the ordinary. “Nay.”

From the stables to their right, an agitated voice rose and all unsettling thoughts about a fey king and a druidess evaporated into the new day’s growing light.

“Hawk,” they both said in unison.

Bryna felt a powerful hand grasp hers, and they both took off at a run to the stables. “Why must birthing be so difficult?” her chieftain mate grumbled.

“Life,” she replied simply, for there was no other explanation. Life’s entry into this world was always violent, always painful. That is why it was worth living. Anything easily won held little value.

Bryna ran beside her long-legged husband. They were both barefooted and dressed in the way of the fey, their clothing spun from black webs. They entered the warm, gray darkness of the first stable and headed down the center aisle. The barn was airy and cleaned daily, allowing the sweet smell of hay to linger. Most of the tribe’s horses were out grazing amongst the green pastures. Only Cloud, Ian’s old dappled gray mare, stood quietly, her head turned toward the sounds of foaling in the stall beside her.

Bryna knew her son Hawk wished Cloud to be kept close when his maiden mare’s time came. The two mares were nearly inseparable, often grazing in close proximity to each other on the fertile pastures.

“Aile Niurin,” their son Hawk spat from the next stall. *Hell fire.*

Tynan released her hand, swung open the stall door, and entered before her. Fresh straw bedding had been laid down in preparation. Dawn Song was on her side, her dark body in obvious distress.

Tynan dropped down beside Hawk, who was kneeling in the wet birthing fluid at the mare's rear quarters. His handsome face soon mirrored their son's frown.

She glanced to the left and found Daegan cradling the mare's head. With gentle hands, he stroked her white forehead, his timbre soothing. Nothing ever seemed to ruffle Daegan. He was strongly linked to the fey, as was she.

Her son's amethyst gaze lifted to hers, and the inner knowing of the land pulsed between them. If she did not speak about the mare, then he would. "Leave the mare be," she said with quiet authority, and two sets of male eyes joined the third in regarding her. Hawk's and Tynan's faces were full of concern, while Daegan's remained unreadable.

Hawk looked at her, then nodded. At seventeen summers, he was confident of life like his chieftain father, and yet there was a disquieting sadness pulsing behind his brown eyes.

She smiled gently and with reassurance. "Watch and wait, Hawk."

Both her husband and adopted son scooted back from the straining mare while Daegan continued to cradle the animal's sculpted head.

Almost immediately, there was a gushing of water from between the dark mare's hind legs. Powerful contractions rippled through the mare's stomach and then . . . a foal's front hooves appeared, followed by shins and bony knees . . . then came a foal's dark nose, head, and . . .

In a final, loud groan, the mare pushed mightily; her gray foal slipped wet and free to the golden hay. A thin white sack wrapped the newborn. The cord, pulsing with life and blood, kept them connected. The mare immediately lifted her head, turned her body, and began licking her squirming foal, her birthing pain forgotten, as is the way.

Bryna smiled. Before the sun pulled free from the horizon, she knew the foal would be up on spindly legs and suckling at his mother's warm teat.

She entered the stall and knelt beside her husband, who was grinning broadly.

Hawk sat back and let out a loud, relieved laugh. "Why did you not come earlier?" he asked as he wiped his right hand across his brown tunic. "Your presence helped her."

"Nay," Daegan said. "It would not have mattered. Now was your mare's time, not before."

"How would you know?"

Daegan shrugged. "I felt it."

Hawk snorted with slight irritation. "You could have told me," he mumbled under his breath.

"Would you have listened to me, Hawk?"

"Nay," Hawk replied with a chuckle. He grasped a handful of clean hay and threw it at his younger brother, who ducked easily away.

In the crowded stall, Bryna felt a sense of family and belonging wash over her. She curled her legs under and pressed more into her husband's solid warmth. He

wrapped a strong arm around her waist and held her close. In silence, they all watched Hawk's mare become acquainted with her new foal.

In the other stall, Cloud nickered loudly and Hawk called out gently. "Rest, old girl. You did well."

The aging mare circled her large stall once, then bent her front legs and dropped down gently in the bedding for much needed rest. Long white lashes closed over blue eyes. Standing sentry was for the young.

Rays of sunlight, having burned away the mist, spilled through the open windows. Peace settled among them. It was a constant and welcome companion these days.

Hawk took his time to reveal his thoughts. He enjoyed the quiet harmony with his family and preferred not to talk of the irritating faeries. He was not one of them, not of the belonging like the rest of his family. The Dark Chieftain prophecy was not in his but in Daegan's blood. It should not matter, but it did. After a long while, he asked what he needed to know.

"What did the faery king want this time? To express more concern over the bard's kingship song naming me dark chieftain?"

"A man is better than his birth," Tynan said into the new morning air. "We earn who we are, Hawk. We do not listen to another's words."

"Aye." Hawk agreed and rested an arm on a bent knee. "I must remember the faeries be family." His focus slid back to the newborn.

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Ignoring the strange two-legged horses in his stall, the gray foal struggled to stand on dark legs and find a teat full of warm milk for his hungry belly.

“Well, I am all for that,” Tynan said, arching a black brow at his faerymate. He rubbed his stomach and grinned at her wide eyes. “Food, faery, food.”

Bryna laughed. Her two sons’ mimicked their father and rubbed their lean bellies, too.

Life was good.



FEY BORN

by R. Garland Gray

BEWARE of spoilers for those who have not read

Predestined, Fey Born and White Fells.

Golden summer, the second season of the ten years had come to pass. *And HIS had been the most unexpected and the most sacrificed of the faery bloodlines I have guarded,* Derina thought. She stood in the sacred fey woodlands, near a pillar of stones, just beyond the guardian’s farm, unwilling to move, lest he sense her.

“COME YOU TO SEE THE GUARDIAN AND HIS MATE, TOO?” the piskie prompted, interrupting her thoughts.

Derina huffed in annoyance and glanced over her shoulder at the tiny faery astride the white rabbit. “Must you follow me through the feypaths, Aelfdene?”

“MUST,” Aelfdene said steadfastly, his lips thinning with displeasure.

“Well then, if you *must*, keep your silence and doona pester me,” she muttered, for she needed to see what she must.



In the late afternoon, sunlight engulfed the land in warmth and glowing. “Done,” Keegan whispered to the ageless stallion who had followed him across the fields. He set the tally stick against the peeling trunk of a dead tree. Above their heads, lifeless boughs continued to strain outward to an ancient calling of lost life, casting cool, twisted shadows across him, the horse, and the land.

There was an eager snort behind him, and a soft muzzle touched one of the scars cascading down his bare back.

“My impatient friend,” he murmured, ignoring the twinge of memories that the horse’s innocent touch had birthed. Reaching into the brown leather pouch tied at his waist, Keegan pulled out a bright fey apple and held it out to the old sorrel stallion. Lightning tossed his head, then accepted the offering greedily.

“Why do you think Derina hides from us, old boy?”

He studied the tall oaks at the end of the farm. He felt the old one, felt her disquiet in the air that he breathed. He felt the wee one, too. Though he sensed their disturbance, he did not feel any threat. And so he allowed them to remain as shade creatures among the trees without his interference. They were carefully still, as if he would not sense them. His lips curved. He sensed all things. The faery king could not cut that out of him, could never cut away his blooded heritage. He was fey born. And as long as the faery king made no threat against his family, he would leave them be. The druidess was always welcome should she wish it.

He returned his attention to the fertile land and let it wash away the dark feelings, the dark memories that continually shadowed his dreams.

The month of *Iúil*, July, was warm with life, color, and gentle fragrances. He loved the change of seasons, the feeling of the land beneath his feet and hands. It was a time of hay making for the farmers and he, like the others, worked hard these many days setting up the racks that would help the cuttings to dry in the sun. He and his son had spread the hay in wide swaths to speed the drying process, and they had begun to see the fruits of their labors. He already had a large pile of hay started down by the monarch oak near the house.

“There be plenty of winter season fodder for the livestock, and I be grateful for that, Lightning.”

A gust of female laughter sounded, followed by a muffled thump.

Lightning lifted his head and nickered at the familiar sound.

Keegan's lips curved. "Aye, boy." He gave the muscular neck a final pat. "It be a rite of passage . . . *again*."

Keegan left the horse. In a few strides, he had walked up the hill and circled around the paddock where his tired oxen rested in the shade.

There were more giggles. As he came around the western side to the monarch oak, he shielded his gray eyes from the late-day sun and grinned broadly.

In a mountain of golden hay, his beautiful blonde wife lay sprawled on her back with arms outstretched. In the numerous boughs above her climbed their youngest daughter.

"What are you doing, Lana?" he asked, pretending for the sake of his youngest that he thought this most silly.

"Showing Bronwen how to jump into the hay," his wife explained, her dark eyes twinkling with joy.

He nodded, feigning serious concern. Several years before, his wife had shown their two oldest children the proper way to jump into a pile of hay. Glenys and Aidan had learned well. Bronwen would be no different.

"Did you do this on your father's farm?" he questioned, keeping the pretense going.

"Aye, she whispered. "Show your father, Bronwen."

"Watch me," Bronwen directed with enthusiasm.

“I be watching,” Keegan promised.

Bronwen climbed easily. She scrambled to the end of one of the thick, sturdy, low-hanging boughs. It was to the left of where they were.

“Watch me!”

“I am,” he promised again with barely contained merriment.

With a quick turn and a yell of delight, she fell backward into the pile of hay. There was a thump followed by a child’s joyous laughter at discovering something new and wonderful.

He dropped his gaze to his mate and pointed to the river. “Lana, the water be down there. Methinks it be better suited for this kind of play.”

In response to his suggestion, she leisurely stretched, her tunic parting slightly and showing him the perfect white skin between her breasts. “Not this kind of play,” she replied.

He inclined his head and spoke very slowly. “How may I serve you, Daughter of the sword?”

Her lips curved in a seductive smile.

He did not pretend to misunderstand.

The left side of hay seemed to move, and his youngest scrambled out and took to the tree once more. She wore hay in her hair as if it were a purposeful decoration.

“Where is Glenys?” he asked.

“Your oldest daughter is in the house.”

“Glenys,” he called softly, his fey voice carried along

the currents of air.

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw his eldest poke her head out of the cottage. The brooch that she always wore caught the sunlight in a familiar shine.

“Watch Bronwen,” he commanded.

His daughter nodded.

Another yell erupted and a younger daughter landed in the hay with a thump and elated squeal.

His wife’s delicate brow furrowed. “What be you thinking?”

Keegan scratched his chin, the silver cuff on his wrist glinting with the sunlight. “Methinks it be time for bathing.”

“Do you, now?” she challenged softly, appreciation of his form lighting her face.

He tilted his head, brown lashes lowering over smoldering eyes. His lips slowly curved.

Lana knew well all of his expressions, and her body quickened in response.

In the next breath, her handsome guardian mate strode purposefully into the hay pile and swept her up into his arms as if she weighed nothing.

“Bronwen, wait for your sister,” Keegan said.

“Aye,” Bronwen laughed, knowing well her parent’s loving behavior.

Lana wrapped her arms around Keegan’s neck and nuzzled his collarbone as he carried her away from the house, down the hill, and over to their spot by the river.

He smelled of rainstorms, no matter his labors in the fields.

“Last eve, two piskies visited Glenys,” she murmured.

He stopped in his tracks. He had not sensed them, and that was greatly disturbing. “What did they want?”

“They demand the return of the Tara brooch.”

He muttered an oath. “’Tis a goddess’s unjust demand, again.” That is why he had not sensed them. The piskies belonged to the golden goddess. “Glenys need not worry. I will see to this.”

“I know you will.”

He strode forward and took a quick sidestep. “Move out of the way, Lightning.”

Lana lifted her head and looked over Keegan’s shoulder. She watched the stallion trot away and . . . for a moment, she thought she saw Derina in the far woods. But then the outline in the shade was gone. Lightning snorted loudly, pulling her attention away. “That horse listens well to you.”

Keegan rolled his eyes. “He listens to the calling of the fey apples, and I have no more to share with him today.”

“It be all the fey apples you feed him that keep him young, my love.” She suckled his ear and felt his arms tighten about her.

“Let me get us to the water,” he said hoarsely.

“Hmmm.” Their three children had been conceived in the waters. It had become their favored place for lovemaking.

“Lana,” he breathed out ruthlessly.

“Aye?” she replied innocently, still sampling him.

“Let me get us to the waters.”

Her mouth was hot against his neck. He tasted of the clear essence of rain.

“By the goddess,” he groaned.

Even as he carried her into the cool waves, his hand locked in her hair, tilting her head back gently. He kissed her with a loving mate’s need.



WHITE FELS

by R. Garland Gray

BEWARE of spoilers for those who have not read

Predestined, Fey Born and White Fells.

Fall and the gentle slowing of living things, the third season of the ten years had come to pass.

The Wind King had been the last and most difficult because he had the power of restraint in him, power to resist anything fey. A latent king born from air and one she could never fully grasp with her fey senses. She stood near the sloping ridge that overlooked the meadows. She was here to see if the bloodline of the winds was as fertile and enduring as she had hoped it would be.

“YOU COME TO SEE THE WIND HERALD AND HIS HEART’S LOVE?”

Derina did not bother to look down. Aelfdene had followed her through the feypaths once again, like an unwanted shadow. The piskie’s rabbit mount shook his white furry head, eliciting the sweet chime of its silver harness. The animal was unnerved by the shifting of time in the feypaths.

“Be you not tired of following me, Aelfdene?” Derina asked as she paused near a decayed ruin of fallen stones.

“NAY. COME TO SEE THE DARK SISTER OF THE FOUR WINDS.”

“Best you never do,” Derina murmured, holding her white, windswept hair away from her face. She looked upward with empty eye sockets. The blue skies were darkening with gray clouds.

“TA GAOTH ANN.”

“Aye, it be windy today,” she agreed and turned her focus where it needed to be. “Now, be quiet with you,” she snapped. “I am only allowed this far and must listen for them before I move on.”

The druidess and piskie stood still, very much aware of the blowing winds and a day giving way to growing grayness.



A stormy wind blew through the lands, but Scota did not

mind. It was the time of the Elder Moon, and the short day was near ending. The fire god lived in the hearth, filling the room with warmth and fiery light, and she, above all else, was content. Well, mostly content, she mused, studying the scroll she had been working on. She had four spirited sons who, like their father, were of *rígdamnai*, kingly material. She pushed her black hair over her shoulder and glanced left at their dark-haired daughter, who slept curled in wool blankets before the glowing hearth. Her heart tightened with worry. She had begun to feel the wintry presence of something magical in her daughter, a foreshadowing of what was to come, and Mairi was only . . .

“What are you doing, my warrior?”

Scota looked up. Her handsome wind king strode into the firelit hall, dressed all in black and carrying a flickering candle in his left hand. “I did not hear you come in,” she said softly and pointed to their sleeping daughter.

He nodded, immediately understanding. “The gusts be loud and fierce today,” he whispered. For a moment, they both listened to the blustery sounds of a new storm coming.

He came close and leaned over her shoulder. “What is this?”

His scent was of the outside and the winnowing winds, and she breathed it in with familiarity. “Records,” she answered, knowing she would need to explain.

His brow furrowed. “Records?”

“Aye, my wind king,” she replied and patted the seat next to her. “Sit beside me,” she said softly, “and let me show you.”

Glancing first at their daughter, he set the candle on the table, then shrugged out of his coat. He tossed it on the chair to their left and slid gracefully onto the wooden bench beside her.

“Where are the boys?” he prompted with quiet curiosity and raked a hand through his tawny mane.

“They play in the other room.”

He glanced toward the room and frowned slightly. “They seem quiet to me.”

They did to her as well, but then, she had asked them to be. “I requested that they play quietly for their sister’s sake. Mairi finally sleeps. I think she feels better.”

He nodded, worry over his daughter’s illness plaguing him. Leaning over, he studied the thin, pale bark his warrior wife had been working on.

Scota pointed to the top left, where she had first written the date and begun the story, using the plant liquid the local simpler had given her. “There were no writings about the wind king,” she began, “no record of his being here except in your blood memory, Boyden. I did not wish that to happen again.”

His blunt fingers grazed the edge of the bark. “How do you know to mark this way?”

She shrugged. “I have memories of it from my father’s house. Each stroke means something.”

“What be this mark?” He pointed to the first set of downward strokes.

“I start at the beginning and tell of our meeting.”

He sat back. “Our meeting?” he prompted low, and grinned. “Of how you held me captive?”

Her lips curved, memories of when they first met as alive within her as they were on that first day. “I tell of the tiny bumps of chill that covered your skin. I tell of your wet, golden hair that clung to your shoulders and chest and how it caught the fire’s light. I tell of your defiance. I tell of your voice that, once spoken, dwelled within me. I tell of the strength of your body, your spirit. I tell of the power I sensed in you, power that made you most dangerous.”

Boyden was speechless and stared into his wife’s serious face.

“You tell all that?”

A twinkle came to her greenish-blue eyes, the golden shards barely visible. “I tell of how I asked you your name, golden one, and how you stubbornly refused to answer me.”

He leaned his forearms on the table and held her gaze to him. “Back then was a time of the invasion.”

“I remember,” she said with grave understanding.

“A time of searching and destiny for me. Lives rested in my hand. I was ill. And here came a beautiful and bold enemy, demanding my submission. One who stirred me as no other.”

“Did I?”

“From the moment I saw you, Scota. You were dangerous to my heart. “

“Good then that you submitted to me, my wind king. Is it not?” she teased.

He studied her with hooded intensity, his lips slowly curving. They both knew who submitted to whom. “What else will you write, my warrior-turned-bard?”

“Of many things,” she replied.

He tilted his head in a thoughtful study. “Of the wind goddess?” The blood vow of the dark innocent stirred restlessly within him.

“Only if you wish it.”

He composed his response slowly. “Methinks it best if we pass the wind knowledge to our children with our words and deeds rather than with these markings.” He touched the bark with a single finger.

“What if we die before telling them?” she questioned softly, ever aware of her sick and sleeping daughter. “Then they will be as you were.”

Boyden glanced at the orange flames of the white candle as he mulled over her wise words. But still he shook his head. “Nay, my warrior. These markings be too dangerous for anyone to understand.”

“But . . .”

He leaned over and silenced her protest with his lips, lost in the taste of her. “Let this future fall to the Wind Guardians,” he murmured. “We, you and I, have earned

this time of peace with our family. Through the passage of seasons, we shall raise our children and tell them of their heritage. *This* be the time for us to guard, not what is to come.” His lips grazed across hers in a warm caress. “*Tá grá agam duit,*” he murmured.

“I love you, too,” she whispered back.

He climbed to his feet. Capturing her hands with his, he pulled her gently with him. “Come, I have a need to be with my family this eve.” He released her and gently scooped up their sleeping daughter, wool blankets and all. The child did not stir from her sleep but nestled close into her father’s corded neck for warmth.

“Does she still feel hot?” Scotá asked with concern.

Boyden touched his daughter’s forehead. “Nay, her skin feels cool to me.”

Relief flooded them both. Together, they quietly walked into the other room and stopped in the open doorway.

Beside him, he felt his wife smile. Their four sons had fallen fast asleep on the rich blue weave in the center of the room, their legs and arms thrown about each other in complete abandonment.

“That is why they were so quiet,” she said and folded her arms across her chest.

“Aye,” he chuckled low. “Methinks they have the right idea.”

She glanced at him with an arched brow of inquiry. “One at a time to their beds?”

“Here, take Mairi; I will bring our sons to their beds. I can still carry two of them at a time. When I am done here, I will join you in our bedchamber.”

“I will be waiting, golden one.” She gave him a look full of meaning before heading for their daughter’s bedchamber.

Boyden’s lips curved as he watched her disappear down the hall. Outside their home, the gusts of wind increased, warnings of a visit from a druidess and an unwelcome piskie.

Boyden nodded to the Elemental’s voice whispering inside him. *Aye*, he had sensed them. But since the two had gone without a word, he set the initial wariness aside. He moved into the room. He would put his sons to bed, check on his frail daughter, then join his beautiful wife in the privacy of their chambers. He set aside the worries of the day. He would face tomorrow’s challenges, tomorrow.



R. GARLAND GRAY

THE DRUIDESS

by R. Garland Gray

A special presentation by the author for
the readers of her Faery Faith series.

*BEWARE of spoilers for those who have not read
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Derina stood in the cold night glade, a withered old crone, alone in the world except for one unwanted, dark-haired piskie who sat astride a white rabbit in a silver harness.

She lifted her face to the chilly rays of moon glow flowing through the dormant trees. Her plea was a simple one. “I protected the faery bloodlines,” she wheezed. “Now be the time to keep your promise to me.”

In response, a white light flashed, hurtful to her empty eye sockets, and Derina cringed, covering her face with crooked hands. Yet, it was not the strike of punishment that filled her being, but the return of what had been taken away.

Aelfdene stared in awe. The wrinkled old crone was no more; in her place stood a white snow goddess.

“Be I free, Aelfdene?” the lovely one asked.

He heard her fear and quickly sought to calm her, “AYE. ’TIS OVER.”

Her hands fell to her sides, and she took in a deep, uneven breath. “Doona follow me.”

Slowly, he shook his head. “I WILLNA FOLLOW, GODDESS.”

On long shapely legs, she ran to the center of the clearing and stopped, caught in a single ray of amber moonlight. She lifted slender arms to the starlit sky, palms facing upward in supplication. Snowflakes began to fall, glistening white crystals that would cloak the land in white for the night. In the next moment, Aelfdene watched the snow goddess vaporize into snowy mist and disappear forevermore.

He bowed his dark head and wept in terrible regret. He wished that he did not feel anything for her. But he knew what they had once been.

He turned Pink Nose toward home and winked out.



For more information about Garland’s books, please visit her Web site at www.rgarlandgray.com

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