



The Advent of Fear

By Mark B. Oliver

Part One

'What do you think?' Beth Summers turned round and burst out laughing as her grandma brandished a bright red feather boa around her shoulders. 'This used to belong to my mother,' continued Beth's gran as she jiggled her hips, causing her 12-year-old grand-daughter to laugh even more.

'You could put it on the Christmas tree if we can't find the tinsel,' replied Beth. They were hunting in the attic for the Christmas decorations and had found all manner of things but there was not a bauble in sight. As her laughing subsided, Beth pulled an old blanket off a dusty box, uncovering copper pots and pans and something that looked quite out of place. Pulling it free, Beth held a frame of some kind and her gran came over.

'Now this belonged to my great-grandmother...' said the old lady. For a moment it seemed to stir a half-memory before she added, 'I'd forgotten all about it. It's the advent calendar she was given for her first Christmas.' The frame was a dull silver colour and about the size of a large book. Its edges were intricately designed and Beth thought it looked quite beautiful. She could see small hinged windows all over its surface, some of which were open and behind each one was a very old photograph.

'That's her there,' murmured Gran wistfully as she pointed to one of the tiny sepia images, a baby in a pretty white dress. 'Ah ha!' Moving the box of pots and pans aside she revealed another, crammed full of decorations. 'I think we deserve a cup of tea now we've found these,' she announced and picking up the box she made her way out of the attic. Beth went to put the advent calendar back, but on a sudden impulse decided to take it with her and after switching off the attic light, made her way downstairs.

Some hours later they were putting the finishing touches to the Christmas tree which sparkled as the tree lights caught the reflective glow of the decorations. Gran's living room, despite being quite large, was warm and cosy. Beth loved seeing her gran and had jumped at the chance to spend a few extra days with her ahead of the holidays. Her parents were arriving on Christmas Eve, so Beth had her grandma all to herself for nearly another week. Exhausted, they both plopped down on chairs admiring their handiwork. Next to Beth's chair, on a small, round, slightly battered mahogany table

lay the advent calendar. Picking it up she studied it more closely. On each of the closed windows she could make out ornate numbers. Beth tried to close one of the open windows, but it wouldn't budge and neither would the next or the next. 'Probably rusted open,' thought Beth. The lowest number that she could see closed was '15'.

'Today's the fifteenth!' declared Beth rather more loudly than she intended.

'That's right dear...' muttered her gran, whose voice tailed off as she fell asleep.

Beth reached for the window and with just the gentlest of touches it swung open... Was that lightning? Beth looked up sharply. A blast of cold air made her shiver and jump at the same time. The room was darker and her gran was gone. The Christmas tree stood in a slightly different position and was now unlit. Where there had been a gas fire seconds earlier a log fire roared but did little to warm the room. The wallpaper was more austere and somehow the furniture had changed. The round mahogany table still stood by Beth's chair but looked new and unscathed.

'I must be dreaming' thought Beth but another chilly breeze made her think again. She reached out, touching the table and suddenly felt the smooth mahogany scar beneath her fingers. It was old again. The room had returned to its usual state and her gran was sleeping quietly. Shaken, Beth stood and in spite of her instincts reached for the sixteenth window. It remained firmly stuck. Realising she had been holding her breath, she let out a deep sigh of relief and put the calendar down. 'Just a silly dream,' she muttered to herself as she tip-toed out of the room to get ready for bed. It was getting late, after all. 'Just a silly dream...'

The following morning was bright and sunny and promising. Gran had nipped into town for a spot of Christmas shopping and Beth was in her bedroom, finishing the last of her holiday homework. Satisfied with her answers, she closed her school books and wandered out onto the landing which overlooked the hall below. Her gran lived in a grand old Victorian house which had been in the family for generations. Beth descended the wide sweeping staircase, which always made her feel like a movie star, and went through to the lounge. The advent calendar was sparkling in the sunlight and Beth picked it up, smiling as she looked at the photographs. Then her heart seemed to miss a beat as she saw, for the first time, the fifteenth photograph. It was of the living room she had dreamt of the night before. Her heart pounded as she again tried to open the sixteenth window. This time she felt it move easily beneath her fingertips.

Another burst of light. Beth shivered as the temperature plummeted and she found herself in the strangely familiar room once more. This time she was standing and had clearly not fallen asleep; she gingerly took a step forward. This was real. It was her gran's living room although with the exception of the small mahogany table she didn't recognise anything. Unlike her Christmas tree the one in this room was cold and sinister. It was dark outside and the room lit only by candles. Walking over to one of the windows she pulled back a curtain. It was snowing outside and on the broad white lawn beneath the oak tree she could see a strange blue wooden box. The oak tree was much smaller, it looked, younger...

'How is that possible?' The door to the hallway suddenly swung open and a tall willow of a woman entered the room. She was pale and unsmiling with dark hair tied tightly and neatly in a bun. She wore a pristine white pinafore over a long black dress that just touched the floor.

'Hello,' stammered Beth, her shaky voice echoing round the room. She ignored her completely and bent down next to the log fire. 'Excuse me...' said Beth but the stranger seemed oblivious to her. 'Can you hear me?' Then something else struck the terrified Beth.

Not only was the woman ignoring her, but there was no noise at all. The flames of the fire which should have been crackling were silent as they moved in their merry dance. While the woman could have had extremely light footsteps Beth should have been able to hear her stoke the fire but there was no noise at all. It was like Beth was watching the television with the sound turned down.

'Are you a maid?' enquired Beth as the woman stood up. Without the slightest hint of recognition, the servant glanced round the room, puffed up some cushions on the sofa right in front of Beth and left as silently as she had arrived, closing the door behind her.

'Where am I?' Beth was shaking as she looked down at her trembling hands which still clutched the advent calendar. In the newly revealed picture was a young man, probably in his mid-thirties wearing a crumpled pin-striped suit. His brown hair was rather unruly even by modern standards and Beth intuitively warmed to him. But there was something else. While all of the other photographs were clearly posed, this one offered a snapshot - a moment of life quickly captured. The figure in the photograph looked unprepared and utterly surprised.

Beth made her way to the door and it opened quietly. Her footsteps on the cold tiled hall floor and her breathing were all she could hear in the large, silent house. She jumped as another maid, almost identical to the first, glided silently across the hallway carrying a large tray with a tea pot and china cups and saucers. The maid knocked twice on the door to the library, before opening it and disappearing inside. Beth narrowed her eyes as she glimpsed what appeared to be her long dead relatives, vaguely familiar from the photographs. She saw one of the ladies holding a baby - a baby in a pretty white dress. They appeared to be laughing and joking but Beth could hear nothing. She had watched the maid knocking on the door, so why hadn't she heard it?

Deciding to explore she crept upstairs, turned the corner of the landing and walked straight into a tall figure who towered over her in the candlelight. She screamed. Loudly.

'Hello!' boomed the man in a warm friendly tone. Looking up she saw the tousled hair from the photograph. It was him. 'Sorry. Didn't mean to startle you,' he said. 'Are you alright?'

'Who are you?' she asked not unreasonably.

'I'm the Doctor!' he replied smiling broadly, as though that answered everything. He took her hand, shaking it vigorously. 'And you look quite lost...' his voice trailed off as he waited for Beth to introduce herself.

'I'm Beth, Beth Summers and I'm not lost exactly. This is my gran's house, well I think it is. It all looks so different and there are maids here and ...' before she had a chance to continue the tall stranger - the Doctor - interrupted her.

'And you suddenly found yourself here, alone in the dark, not knowing who or what brought you here.'

Beth nodded slowly. 'Do you know, Doctor?'

The Doctor sucked some air in sharply through his teeth. 'Sorry, not a clue, no idea. Sorry.' Then he grinned broadly, a wide welcoming smile that Beth instantly trusted. 'Ah, but you're my responsibility now. I'll get you back home. I promise.' He winked at her before asking, 'What was the date this morning?'

'December 16th 2009,' she replied. Beth was calming down now, her mind racing to process what the Doctor was implying. 'I've moved back in time?'

'Oh, very good, Beth Summers!' replied the Doctor. 'You're quick. I like quick. And, yep, you've moved back in time! It's December 1859.'

'But... but how is that possible? You don't look as though you're from 1859, you're wearing trainers and your hair doesn't look very Victorian...' Beth laughed despite herself, as the Doctor involuntarily ran his fingers through his hair.

'Umm, well you know how it is, one minute you're knee deep in giant wasps and screeching companions and the next you're taking a stroll on one of the twin moons of Prionia. I've been busy!' Before he could continue, a door off the upstairs landing opened. A smartly dressed man in a butler's uniform emerged and swiftly walked past them and quickly, but deliberately, stepped down the stairs towards the front door.

'Come on, I want to try something,' said the Doctor as he sped after the butler. Hesitating only momentarily, Beth ran frantically down the stairs after her new friend. 'Wow, he's fast' she thought to herself as she caught up with him, breathing heavily.

The butler opened the door and welcomed a lady and gentleman who were standing outside. Beth and the Doctor stood to the side, as the butler's mouth moved but no sound came out and the man silently replied.

'Try to sneak past them out into the snow,' suggested the Doctor.

'But I'm not dressed for snow,' Beth protested as she looked down at her skirt and slippers.

'Just try!' urged the Doctor. Beth moved around the lady, who was now removing her coat, and reached the threshold but could go no further. Try as she might she couldn't step through the doorway.

'My feet won't move, Doctor. I can't step over.'

'So neither of us can leave the house...' pondered the Doctor. Beth turned her head sharply towards the newcomers. 'Oh, don't worry, they can't see or hear us,' said the Doctor motioning to the people stood beside them.

'Whoever did this wants us to stay inside. Now, let's see if we can find something to eat in the kitchen while we plan our next move.' As the butler silently escorted the two visitors to the library, the Doctor and Beth walked across the hall, their footsteps echoing around the house.

'Whatever caused this is way beyond current Earth technology. The TARDIS...'

'The TARDIS?' interrupted the confused young girl.

'My ship, the TARDIS, was drawn here by a temporal signature. As I entered the house there was a flash and I found myself - I dunno - out-of-sync with reality. Some sort of temporal trap. Not being able to hear any sound is a side effect. Or a clue. Or both.'

'You're not from Earth?' asked Beth, her eyes widening in disbelief.

'Well, no but some of my best friends are human,' he said cheerily.

'But you don't look alien' she persevered.

'Oh, aliens come in all shapes and sizes and some look, well, just like you and me,' replied the very human looking Doctor.

As they entered the kitchen, the cook was silently barking out orders as the maids and footmen busied themselves with their duties.

'The kitchen is the heart of the house, I always find,' said the Doctor. 'And more importantly, the best place to find - yah, here we go!' He carved two generous slices from a fruit cake that was still warm on top of the oven and handed one slab to Beth. They sat on stools in a corner of the busy room, watching the silent servants and tucking into the cake.

'The question is, why are you here?' wondered the Doctor, 'I can think of quite a few reasons why someone would want me out of the way for eternity, but why you?'

'I think it has something to do with this,' said Beth between bites, showing the Doctor the advent calendar. 'It used to belong to my grandma's great-grandmother. That's her in the picture.' Beth pointed to the baby in the photograph. 'And look. In this window...'

'Is me,' finished a puzzled-looking Doctor. He removed a pair of dark rimmed glasses from his breast pocket and perched them atop his nose. 'I see what you mean about the hair.'

Beth smiled as the Doctor tried to make light of the situation but she could sense his concern. He fished in his pockets and pulled out a long cylindrical object with a blue light at one end.

'I wonder what would happen if I did this...' The Doctor activated the device which emitted a whistling sound as the blue light lit up. 'Now that's interesting,' muttered the Doctor, engrossed in his experiment. Beth glanced around.

'Doctor,' she stammered.

'Oh, now aren't you a clever little thing?' he murmured, clearly distracted by the calendar.

'Doctor!' Beth half screamed, her chest tightening with fear.

The Doctor looked up and saw the maids advancing menacingly towards them; their arms outstretched, with pure white unseeing eyes. The Doctor eased Beth back into the corner as the servants' relentless advance continued. They were going to be torn limb from limb. Beth closed her eyes tight as the nearest maid reached towards her...

Part Two

The blank-eyed maid reached towards Beth as the whistling sound of the Doctor's device ceased. Slowly opening her eyes Beth saw she was back in her gran's kitchen. No servants, no Doctor but she was still clutching the advent calendar he had been examining moments earlier. She leaned on the kitchen table for support as her gran bustled through the door carrying half a dozen bulging bags. Beth let out an involuntarily yelp at her sudden appearance.

'Sorry, dear, didn't mean to startle you!' Her gran's smile flickered. 'Are you alright? You look white as a sheet.'

'I'm fine,' Beth croaked. 'I just didn't hear you coming, that's all.' Before her gran could quiz her further, she mentioned something about homework and dashed upstairs.

Beth was in her bedroom changing out of her pajamas into jeans, trainers, a long sleeved blouse and her warmest cardigan. If she was going back she wanted to be warm and ready this time, and she had to go back, to help the Doctor. Picking up the advent calendar, Beth turned on the torch she had retrieved from her gran's toolbox earlier. She crept out of her bedroom and made her way to the kitchen. Standing in the dark room illuminated only by the torchlight she peered at her wrist watch. Slowly the second hand moved around the dial until all three hands pointed to the number twelve. It was midnight. Taking a deep breath and with a combination of fear and anticipation, Beth reached for the seventeenth window and slowly opened it.

'Beth!' beamed the Doctor. They were alone in the old kitchen and he carried a lantern. 'I knew I could count on you!' He blew out the lantern's candle.

'How did you get away?' asked Beth.

'Ahh, well, the maids were reacting to my sonic screwdriver...' The Doctor brandished his strange gadget before slipping it into his suit pocket. 'Saw it as a threat to the calendar but when I switched it off, the threat was gone and they just carried on with what they were doing... as though nothing had happened.' The Doctor's voice was already trailing off as he took the calendar from Beth and examined it once more. 'Ingenious! I mean, wrong. But ingenious. Whoever is behind this made their equipment look like an ordinary advent calendar. They got their dates a bit mixed up but still... If you hadn't provided the clue, Beth, I doubt I'd have realised that this was the key to everything.' He gave that smile again. 'Thanks.'

'So what's our next step?'

'We find the original calendar, the one that you'll eventually discover in your gran's attic. Now I wonder where - '

'How about the library? It's an ideal place with all that shelving.'

'A library? Oh, I don't - '

'What's wrong with libraries?'

'Nothing. I like libraries. I love libraries. Just that lately every time I visit a library something... oh, come on. The library it is!' As they crossed the hallway the Doctor stopped suddenly. He glanced over at the grandfather clock that stood against the wall opposite the front door. Slowly he made his way over to it staring intently at its face. 'Beth, how long would you say you've been back?'

She thought for a moment. 'A few minutes at most.' The Doctor stood aside and she saw the clock clearly. It was 1.43. Beth's watch also indicated that it was nearly a quarter to two. 'How's that possible?' she asked incredulously.

'Relative time seems to be accelerating. We need to hurry.'

Beth shone the torch around the library as the door closed silently behind them. Hundreds of books lined the walls and it was difficult to make much out in the darkness. Beth brushed against a chair she hadn't seen in the gloom and caught her breath. The Doctor touched her reassuringly on the shoulder.

'It's okay, Beth, everyone's asleep.' The Doctor reached for a book and pulled it from the shelf, 'Bleak House,' he proclaimed, 'One of Charlie's best.' He went to return it to the shelf but some powerful force tore it from him. It flew from his hand, hitting the curtains at the far end of the room. Beth's eyes widened as she saw that dozens of books were moving of their own accord. With no warning a book hurtled towards her, narrowly missing her head. Then another whistled towards the Doctor and another and another. He burst into action, sprinting across the room, vaulting over a chair and sweeping Beth up towards the door.

Beth reached for the handle but it wouldn't turn. 'I can't open it!' she cried as the books flew towards them; Beth, painfully aware that they were striking the Doctor, who was shielding her from their vicious assault. The sonic screwdriver whistled as the Doctor directed it towards the handle, but still it wouldn't budge. 'He won't be able to withstand this for long,' Beth realised desperately.

Suddenly she ducked under the Doctor's arm and weaved her way across the room, dodging the heavy books tearing through the air. 'This way!' she yelled, as she felt underneath one of the shelves. Her anxious fingers pressed a concealed indentation. 'Got it!' A section of wall swung open and Beth and the Doctor fell through the opening to escape the barrage, the door slamming shut behind them. Breathing heavily Beth leaned against the wall to catch her breath as the Doctor ran his fingers through his hair.

'What did I tell you? Me and libraries. Every time! But Beth!' The Doctor clasped her by the shoulders. 'That was brilliant!' he exclaimed brightly. 'And looks like someone wants to stop us finding the other calendar...'

They were stood in a brick passageway.

'This leads to the living room,' Beth panted. 'My grandfather showed me years ago. It's amazing what you remember in a crisis.' At the far end of the passage Beth found the right spot on the brickwork and the door slid open, flooding the passageway with bright light. The unexpected glare momentarily blinded them both, but their eyes quickly adjusted as they made their way into the room. The curtains were open and on the bright, white, snow covered lawn Beth could see the strange blue box she had noticed earlier. There was something indefinably reassuring about it.

But now she was distracted by a more immediate presence. A stranger stood by the sideboard, his back to Beth and the Doctor as he examined something on its surface. He half-turned and Beth instinctively took a step back. He was pale, tall and very thin, smartly dressed in a dark, dour suit with a tiny white carnation in his buttonhole.

Beth turned off the torch and put it down on one of the side tables. The Doctor was looking at the clock over the mantle. 'It's 9.10 already,' he announced. The thin man moved towards a chair, picking up a newspaper from the sideboard as he went. Beth could see his small, dark beady eyes, horn rimmed spectacles and thin moustache. He sat down in a deep red gentleman's chair.

The Doctor moved towards to the sideboard and Beth saw what he was looking at. It was the advent calendar, brighter, newer than hers but undoubtedly the same. The Doctor fished her calendar from his pocket and put it beside the other.

'I wonder when he had the chance to slip it in there?' thought Beth. A crackling noise came from both frames and a blue light arced between them, like tiny bolts of lightening.

'Now, that's interesting...' murmured the Doctor, 'And shouldn't be happening.' He reached for the frame before snatching back his hand as a bolt of light struck it. 'Yep, well, should've realised that would hurt.' The Doctor took a step back. 'It's part organic,' he mused, 'That's the only explanation.'

'Organic? But it's made of metal.'

'It's not a metal known on this planet, Beth. It's some kind of organic alien technology; not a type I recognise. And that's rare. And worrying. The organic component is what's causing the power discharge.' Beth looked blank and the Doctor added, 'If the exact same organic matter from different times touch, a large amount of energy is released.' As he spoke the Doctor glanced at the man. He was looking directly at him.

'Who are you?' demanded the Doctor. The wraith-like figure lowered the newspaper without breaking his gaze and turned his head ever so slightly to maintain eye contact.

'I'm giving you a choice,' the Doctor declared. 'Release us now and leave peacefully. I know you're not human and I can help you. But if you continue with this I will not be responsible for the consequences.' The Doctor's voice held a dark undertone but

here was no reaction from the stranger, just a cold, blank unblinking stare. Suddenly he stood and quickly walked from the room. Beth and the Doctor ran to the doorway but he was nowhere to be seen.

'Where did he go? He couldn't have crossed the hall that quickly!' exclaimed Beth.

'What's next door?' asked the Doctor.

'The dining room,' replied Beth, fear creeping into her voice.

The Doctor looked down and said gently. 'Its okay, you don't have to come with me if you don't want to. You can stay here by the fire.'

Beth looked back into the living room and shuddered. 'No, I'd feel safer with you, Doctor.'

The Doctor moved towards the dining room, gently edged open the door and stepped into the room. Immediately it was dark and in literally a flash the room was illuminated by a single large chandelier which held a dozen suddenly lit candles that hung over the long dining table. Beth kicked herself for not keeping the torch with her as their eyes adjusted to the relative gloom. There was no sign of their quarry.

A pale blue light throbbed through the darkness and without exchanging a word they moved cautiously towards it. Despite the danger Beth felt a sense of calm and somewhere in her subconscious she realized the light was soothing her, silencing her, tricking her, trapping her. As they crossed the room she could see the light emanated from behind the drawn curtains. The light. The soft, soothing light...

With a sharp, sudden flourish the Doctor tore a curtain aside and Beth screamed as the thin man's face stared back at them.

She felt a moment's relief as she realized he was on the other side of the window but a deeper sense of dread claimed her as he turned, looking across the lawn. He wanted them to see something and his hangman's smile left no doubt as to its nature. The blue box that she had seen earlier was now encased in the arcing blue light. The light was some kind of prison.

The Doctor smacked his open palm against his forehead. 'Of course!' he shouted. 'I thought he wanted me, us, out of the way, but that isn't it at all. He wants the TARDIS. He's using the released temporal energy to break down her defences!'

'That's your ship?'

'Oh, yes! No time to explain, Beth, but that alien wants the last functioning time machine in the universe and we need your advent calendar to stop him.'

'Did you say time machine?'

But the Doctor was already sprinting towards the door. It slammed shut before him. As Beth ran forward she felt a breeze above her head. The chandelier had started to

spin and it was gaining speed. It span faster and faster until its chain silently snapped. Beth involuntarily winced expecting the candles to crash into the table below, but the chandelier hovered.

She glanced towards the Doctor in amazement as the flames of the candles merged into one intense blaze. Suddenly the spinning circle moved swiftly towards them and Beth instinctively pushed the Doctor to the ground as the flames whipped through the air where his head had been moments earlier.

'Thanks for that,' breathed the Doctor appreciatively. They scrambled under the table as the flames renewed their assault, striking blow after blow onto the tabletop above.

'It's not going to protect us for long,' whispered Beth.

The Doctor was adjusting his sonic screwdriver and telling her to remain where she was; he rolled out from under the table and bounded to his feet. Reacting to the movement, the chandelier flew towards him. The Doctor aimed the sonic screwdriver directly at the approaching flames and activated it.

Nothing happened.

The circle of fire sliced towards the Doctor. Beth unthinkingly dug her palms into the floor, pushing herself away from the inevitable collision but at the last moment the whine from the sonic screwdriver increased by an octave and the chandelier was halted, seemingly fighting with the device for control. A look of fierce concentration on his face, the Doctor intensified the sonic emissions. And then it was over. The flames tripled in size for a dangerous, terrifying moment before the chandelier stopped spinning and crashed to the ground.

'Come on!' shouted the Doctor to Beth.

They raced towards the door but Beth put her hand on the Doctor's arm, bringing him to a halt. It had taken them a moment to register the noise but they could both hear tiny whispers echoing around them, numerous voices talking disjointedly, a baby wailing.

'The trap is closing, reality is breaking through. Those are the voices of the people that live here. We're nearly out of time, Beth. I need your help. Are you any good with a... Come on, I'll explain through here...'

He stood waiting for them as they entered the living room which was flooded with daylight. The Doctor moved towards the frames, the blue electricity more intense now. The pale alien stared coldly at them, seemingly unconcerned by their presence. The Doctor reached for Beth's advent calendar. The whispers were growing louder and louder reaching a crescendo of deafening volume. Beth nodded her understanding and the Doctor snatched up Beth's calendar. Energy surged through him and the Doctor was thrown across the room.

As the alien watched him crash into the wall and slump motionless to the floor, Beth seized her chance. She quickly took the sinister being's photograph with the camera

she had been concealing behind her back. Instantly he vanished. Beth knelt beside the Doctor who had propped his back against the wall. He was winded but otherwise unhurt. Every window of her frame was now open revealing twenty four identical photographs of the alien. The photo she had just taken. Slowly the images of the alien dissolved revealing the photographs of her family beneath. The photos of the eerie room and the Doctor had vanished, too, replaced by more innocent pictures.

'It's over,' said the Doctor quietly as Beth helped him to stand. The whispers were gone too, replaced by the sounds of a busy household. 'We'd better be off before we're noticed. I think we'll find they'll be able to see us now.'

'How did you know that taking a photograph of the alien would trap him instead of us?' asked Beth, as they crossed the lawn a short time later.

'Some humans believe that taking someone's photograph steals their soul. The alien was using technology that worked on a similar principle and we used that knowledge against him.'

'And you had a camera the entire time...'

'Oh, well you know how it is. You pick things up, put them in your pockets and forget they're even there till you need them. Now, it's time we got you home, Beth Summers, before your gran starts to worry.'

'I've had enough excitement to last me a lifetime!' she replied as the Doctor unlocked the TARDIS door. As Beth stepped inside, he smiled as she gasped loudly from within. He followed her into his ship and hesitated before closing the door, glancing across the lawn at the imposing Victorian house. For a second the Doctor thought he saw a pale figure watching him from the other side of the garden. He gently closed the door and moments later the TARDIS dematerialized, observed by the solitary watcher from a distance, before he too disappeared into the morning air.

THE END

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