





Alice Goldin-Coates
1934

Alice Goldin-Coates was born on 20 July, 1922 in Vienna. In May 1938 she fled with her parents and her sister to Great Britain. In 1948 she emigrated to South Africa where she still lives. Alice Goldin is a famous painter and her greatest wish to once again return to the city of her childhood and to present her art here, has become reality. In May 2012 she came to Vienna for the opening of the exhibition "Alice Goldin – To celebrate her 90th birthday" in the *Künstlerhaus*.

... darum **verdanken** **wir** ihr **unser Leben**

Alice Goldin-Coates Südafrika, geboren 1922 South Africa, born 1922

Alice Goldin-Coates wurde am 20. Juli 1922 in Wien geboren. Sie konnte noch im Mai 1938 mit ihren Eltern und ihrer Schwester nach Großbritannien fliehen. 1948 emigrierte sie nach Südafrika, wo sie auch heute noch lebt. Alice Goldin-Coates ist eine bekannte Künstlerin, und ihr großer Wunsch, noch einmal in die Stadt ihrer Kindheit zurückzukehren und auszustellen, hat sich erfüllt: Im Mai 2012 war sie zur Eröffnung der Ausstellung „Alice Goldin – Anlässlich ihres 90. Geburtstages“ im Künstlerhaus in Wien zu Gast.

Erinnerungen

Der „Anschluss“ war im März 1938, und ich verließ Wien im Mai, daher habe ich wenig Erinnerungen an diese Zeit, ich war auch sehr jung.

Mein Vater wurde zweimal in der Mitte der Nacht von der SS zum Verhör weggeführt. Es war ein Wunder, dass er unversehrt zurückkam. Er war ein aktives Mitglied der Union österreichischer Juden¹ und der B'nai B'rith². Mein Vater war ein patriotischer Österreicher und wollte seine Heimat nicht verlassen. Meine Mutter sah die Situation viel klarer und hat meinen Vater überzeugt, dass er so rasch wie möglich das Land verlassen muss, darum verdanken wir ihr unser Leben. Wer von unserer Familie zurückgeblieben ist, ist umgekommen: die ganze Familie meiner Mutter – sie hatte zwei Brüder und deren Frauen in Wien, und eine Schwester und ihre Eltern in Brünn; sie starben alle in Auschwitz und Theresienstadt. Eine Nichte hat sie herausgebracht, und ihre jüngere Schwester ist nach Amerika ausgewandert.

Mein Vater war Handlungsreisender und Spezialist im Export von Textilien und hatte Kontakte in England – er verließ Wien Ende März, und meine Mutter, meine Schwester und ich folgten Ende Mai.

Als *émigrés* [Emigranten] in England war es sehr schwer für meine Eltern, sich an ein neues Leben zu adaptieren. Materiell hatten meine Eltern natürlich [fast] alles verloren – manche ihrer Möbel kamen noch mit einem Transport nach England, aber vieles wurde gestohlen, und alles Geld, das zurückgeblieben war, wurde konfisziert von den Nazis.

Sie mussten eine neue Sprache lernen und versuchen, ein neues Heim für ihre Kinder zu schaffen. Ich erinnere mich besonders an den fortwährenden Kummer meiner Mutter über ihre ganze Familie, die zurückgeblieben war und wo aller Kontakt unmöglich war. Meiner Eltern Generation war es, die die tiefsten Leiden der Judenverfolgung spürte, und ich glaube, dass diese Wunden nie vollkommen geheilt sind. Für uns Kinder war es ganz anders. Wir adaptierten uns viel leichter an unser neues Leben in England, wir hatten auch das Glück, liebende Eltern und ein Heim zu haben.

¹ In Reaktion auf den aufkommenden politischen Antisemitismus in Österreich war 1884 die Union österreichischer Juden als Organisation zur Vertretung der Interessen der österreichischen Jüdinnen und Juden gegründet worden.

² B'nai B'rith (hebr., „Söhne des Bundes“): eine der größten internationalen jüdischen Organisationen, die sich unter anderem für Toleranz, humanitäre und soziale Ziele einsetzt.

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Hier möchte ich noch erwähnen, dass ich eine Tante hatte – ihr erster Mann war ein Onkel meines Vaters, Nettie Kunitzer, später Königstein – sie war zweimal Witwe, und am 14. März 1938 hat sie sich das Leben genommen. Ihr erster Mann, Dr. Kunitzer, hat eine Zeit lang in Amerika gelebt und war Doktor der Guggenheims³ – er kam als sehr reicher Mann nach Wien zurück und hatte ein fürstliches Haus in der Nähe der Votivkirche. Es war voll von herrlichen Gobelins und alten Möbeln. Ihr Eigentum wurde, da sie Jüdin war, nach dem „Anschluss“ Österreichs von den Nazis konfisziert.

Alice Goldin-Coates describes her and her families' fate in English language, too.

My parents' great hardship

I do not know how my late father Eduard Widrich was involved, politically; I think he was an active member of an Austrian-Jewish organisation and the B'nai B'rith⁴ in Vienna, he was a great patriot. I do know that immediately after the “*Anschluss*” in March 1938 he was twice arrested and interrogated by the *Gestapo*. On his release my mother, with great foresight, persuaded him to leave right away for England, where he had business connections (he had been exporting Austrian textiles). My mother, sister and I followed in May 1938.

It was, of course, traumatic for my parents to leave their beloved home and emigrate, losing all their possessions and savings, going to a strange country, where they did not even speak the language. Mixed with their great relief that their own family was safe was the great worry for the loved ones left behind. My mother's two brothers and their wives lived in Vienna, and her parents and sister lived in Brno – they all perished in concentration camps. My father's aunt Nettie Königstein (formerly Kunitzer) committed suicide the day after the “*Anschluss*” on 14 March, 1938. As her second husband had recently died she was in a state of depression at that time of the “*Anschluss*”, which probably was partly the reason for her suicide.

³Die Familie Guggenheim ist eine ursprünglich aus der Schweiz stammende, amerikanische Industriellenfamilie, die im Bergbau reich geworden war und unter anderem mit kunstsammlerischen und philanthropischen Tätigkeiten bekannt geworden ist.

⁴B'nai B'rith (Hebrew, “Sons of the Covenant”): one of the largest international Jewish organizations promoting tolerance and pursuing humanitarian and social aims.



Sketch of Alice by her
grandfather Samuel
Brunner, 1930

The following text comes from a book from the year 2012 in which Alice Goldin-Coates published her entire life story, and it gives a much more detailed insight into her life.⁵

Vienna: Early Memories

[...]

I was born in Vienna in 1922. One of the earliest memories of my childhood in Vienna was the arrival of my baby sister, Sue, in 1927. She was five years younger than I and grew up to be a real tomboy – quite different to me. I was rather a shy child and a very good little girl – with one exception. I hated food, and meals were a pain. I was rather pale and thin and was given spinach and liver regularly. Milk had to be boiled (because it was not pasteurised), so that there was skin on top and it was particularly repulsive! To this day I refuse to drink milk, nor do I like liver or spinach.

I remember my first school days at primary school just around the corner, and later I went to the Döblinger [19th District of Vienna] girls' high school. I did well at school but I was shy and did not have many friends. In addition my parents were very protective. We lived in a flat in Währing [18th District of Vienna], and one of the early walks that I remember was to Schubert Park, where both Schubert and Beethoven were originally buried. On Sundays I would walk with my father to Türkenschanz Park and inevitably had to guide him to go the right way out as he was completely devoid of a sense of direction. I loved my father: he was my best friend always.

In the summer school holidays we went to a farmhouse in the mountains that took paying guests, and my father would join us for short breaks to get away from the heat of Vienna. There was beautiful scenery. There were stables with cows that we were allowed to watch at milking time – a great change from our usual town life. My sister, who later became a vet, loved being around the stables but I'm afraid I was always rather nervous. I preferred to go with my father up the mountain tops – happy memories indeed!

[...]

⁵ Jeremy Lawrence (ed.), *Alice Goldin*, Cape Town 2012.

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When I was in high school I was sometimes able to go to the opera in the afternoon. I would stand in line to get in cheaply and remain standing all through the performance. In this way I heard a wide range of operas, and I also saw many plays at the Burgtheater. When I was fourteen my parents felt it would be appropriate for me to have dancing lessons, so I went to a place in the centre of Vienna called Ellmayer, which was also used as a riding-school for Lipizzaner horses. The boys attending had to wear white gloves as we learnt to waltz. It is a funny, curious memory of something that happened so long ago.

So life continued until 11 March 1938, when I woke up to the roar of German planes flying in formation over Vienna. I looked out of the window and saw many youngsters emerging from a basement on the opposite side of the street, dressed in khaki uniforms with swastika armbands. It was the *Anschluss*: Austria became part of the German Reich, and life as we had known it came abruptly to an end. My father, who had a senior position in the *Bund der Österreichischen Juden*⁶, a very patriotic organisation, was twice taken to be interrogated in the middle of the night by a young SS lieutenant who had arrived in Vienna on 16 March: Adolf Eichmann⁷. When he was interrogated a second time my mother insisted that he would not be so lucky a third time, and he therefore left immediately for England where he had been on business shortly before, exporting Austrian textiles. My mother, sister and I followed soon afterwards. We were now refugees from Nazi oppression! All my mother's family and many, many others we knew were to perish in concentration camps.

Refugee in England

[...]

Arriving in England in May 1938, we were most grateful to escape Austria and to be in safety. We were among the many who were fortunate to find refuge in England at that time. My parents of course had to adjust to their new surroundings. My father was lucky enough to have work, but it took some time for him to learn a for-

⁶ Meant is: *Union österreichischer Juden* (Union of Austrian Jews). The Union of Austrian Jews was founded in 1884 as an organization representing Austrian Jewry in response to emerging political anti-Semitism.

⁷ Adolf Eichmann (1906–1962), *SS-Obersturmbannführer*, was one of the major organizers of the Holocaust, facilitating and managing the logistics of the mass deportation of Jews to the ghettos, concentration and extermination camps. After World War II, he fled to Argentina, where in 1960 he was captured by the Israeli secret service Mossad and taken to Israel to face trial. He was sentenced to death and executed by hanging in 1962.



Alice with her
parents and her
little sister Sue,
walking in the
mountains on
holiday, 1932



Alice and her sister
Sue in the 1930s

Alice enjoyed
hiking.



Alice's parents in a game of bridge, on holiday in Portschach (Carinthia), 1935



Alice "Gigi" and her sister Sue "Susi" with their mother



Alice (sitting, far right) on a school outing, 1934

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eign language. Somehow as children (I was fifteen and my sister ten) we were never allowed to be aware of those difficulties. However, I am sure it was not an easy time for my parents. I remember that we always had a secure home, went to school and settled down very quickly in our new environment. In fact we were much protected and our lives continued normally.

At the outbreak of war in September 1939 I was on holiday in Wales, and as an enemy alien I had to report to the nearest police station. This was always a happy experience as the English police were most kind and courteous. We had to report any change of address and had a curfew of our movements at night. So when I took the train back from Wales, I had to spend some hours on the railway bench and then report to the police before I could go on my way. Very soon tribunals were organised and we became friendly aliens without any restriction whatsoever. I immediately fell in love with London and the English. War-time challenges brought out the very best in them: they dropped their usual reserve and never did I see anyone afraid, even when the bombs started to fall. After the all-clear siren sounded people would emerge from their underground shelters, saying things like “It was quite a noisy night last night”. They never lost their sense of humour.

The worst were the fire bombs and the “doodlebugs”, which were unmanned missiles that would come down and explode when the engine stopped. Many cities were devastated, especially the East End of London and industrial and strategic cities like Coventry, Plymouth and Bristol. There was a total blackout, food and clothes rationing, and also tight control of water and heating. Before leaving Vienna I had quite seriously considered going to art school but that now seemed irrelevant. Instead I trained as a children’s nurse to help look after evacuated children who were taken to the country for safety. Later I worked in a day-nursery in London so as to free other women doing war work.

Then after the war I took a secretarial course and worked for the Council of Christians and Jews⁸. It was a very happy time for me as our office was near the Strand [street in London] and I could spend my lunch hours at the National Gal-

⁸The Council of Christians and Jews (CCJ) is a voluntary organization in the United Kingdom and was founded in 1942 by Chief Rabbi Joseph H. Hertz and Archbishop William Temple. It is composed of Christians and Jews working together to counter anti-Semitism and other forms of intolerance in Britain.

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lery and get to know its treasures [...]. My parents had a flat in St John's Wood and I always walked to work, which I loved, particularly the walk across Regent's Park; I especially loved the splendour of the rose garden in summer. After the war my father bought a secondhand car, a Hillman Minx, and I remember that my driving lessons took place around the Albert Hall – where I went to many Promenade concerts. How wonderful it all was to be young and to be able to enjoy London!

The war in Europe had ended on 8 May 1945 amid great celebrations – and although rationing continued, that was unimportant when one was young.

South Africa

My father had a brother who in 1934 married a South African and settled in Johannesburg. For some time he had invited me to come and visit him and to meet my cousins, so at the end of 1947 I agreed, a little reluctantly, to make the journey. I was already on my way from London to Johannesburg when I was shocked by certain remarks made by South African passengers which made me aware of their attitude to the black population in South Africa. My work with the Council of Christians and Jews in London was especially intended to fight against any kind of discrimination on grounds of religion and colour. So right away I was made aware of the prevailing racial problems and prejudices and was impatient to return to England as soon as possible.

Fate, however, decreed otherwise. At a party for ex-servicemen I met Harry Goldin. He decided I was the girl he had always been waiting for, and I was very happy in his company, so after a fairly brief period of courtship we were married. It was all rather strange for me. I knew no one and I was in a different kind of world – but I knew that this was right for me.

Harry [...] was born in 1900. He had studied dentistry in Michigan, for at the time there had been no dental school in South Africa.

We were married early in 1948 in Johannesburg. My parents came to the wedding, which was a small family affair. It had been a difficult decision for me to make – to live far away from my close friends in a strange country – but I always felt sure this was the right way for me to go. As Harry's dental practice was in Pretoria we settled there



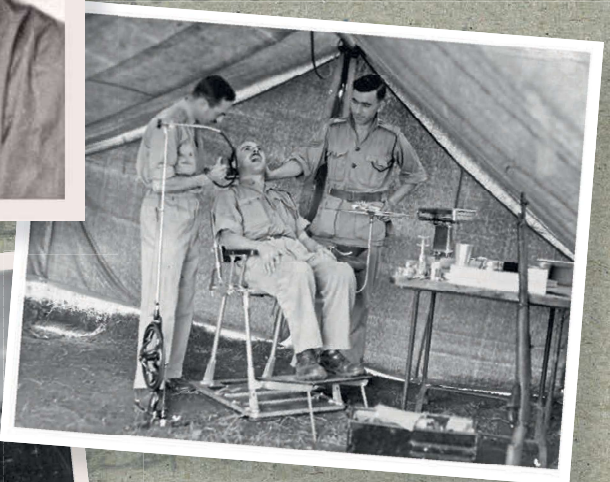
With friends in Hyde Park, Chong is doing a handstand, London 1944.



Alice, when she was pregnant with Jaqui, Pretoria 1950



Alice worked as a children's nurse and helped evacuated children, e.g. taking them down to the shelter when the siren sounded, London 1943.



Harry Goldin's field dental surgery during his time at the medical corps of the South African Army, 1942



Alice and her husband Harry, 1948

A letter written by Alice in Pretoria to her parents

Faded, illegible cursive handwriting from a letter, visible in the background of the collage.

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in a lovely Norman Eaton house⁹ up on the hill of Waterkloof Ridge. Nothing could have been more different from my previous life in England. Harry's family in Pretoria were most welcoming and were delighted that Harry was married at last!

In the beginning I knew no one and was very homesick for London. But help was at hand. My sister-in-law Lilian Solomon, who was just a year older than Harry, was a very bright personality who actively supported the arts. She was also a wonderful hostess; her husband Ivan Solomon was a lawyer and had been the mayor of Pretoria in the 1930s. She took me under her wing and I was introduced into their hectic social life. I was taken regularly to lectures at the Pretoria Women's Club, and to leave visiting-cards at the homes of newly arrived members of the Diplomatic Corps. In due course I was even invited to the Governor General's garden-party!

[...]

Being pregnant and having children came very easily to me, especially as I had worked with children throughout the war years in England. Having my first child, Alan Robert, was an experience I could never forget. I was conscious of the presence of another sphere around and within me – it was wonderful and exhilarating to be witness to the birth of my first child. I felt the same when my daughter Jacqueline Ann was born in 1951, and later with the arrival of two more sons, Ian Andrew in 1955 and Sven Erik in 1965.

Art School

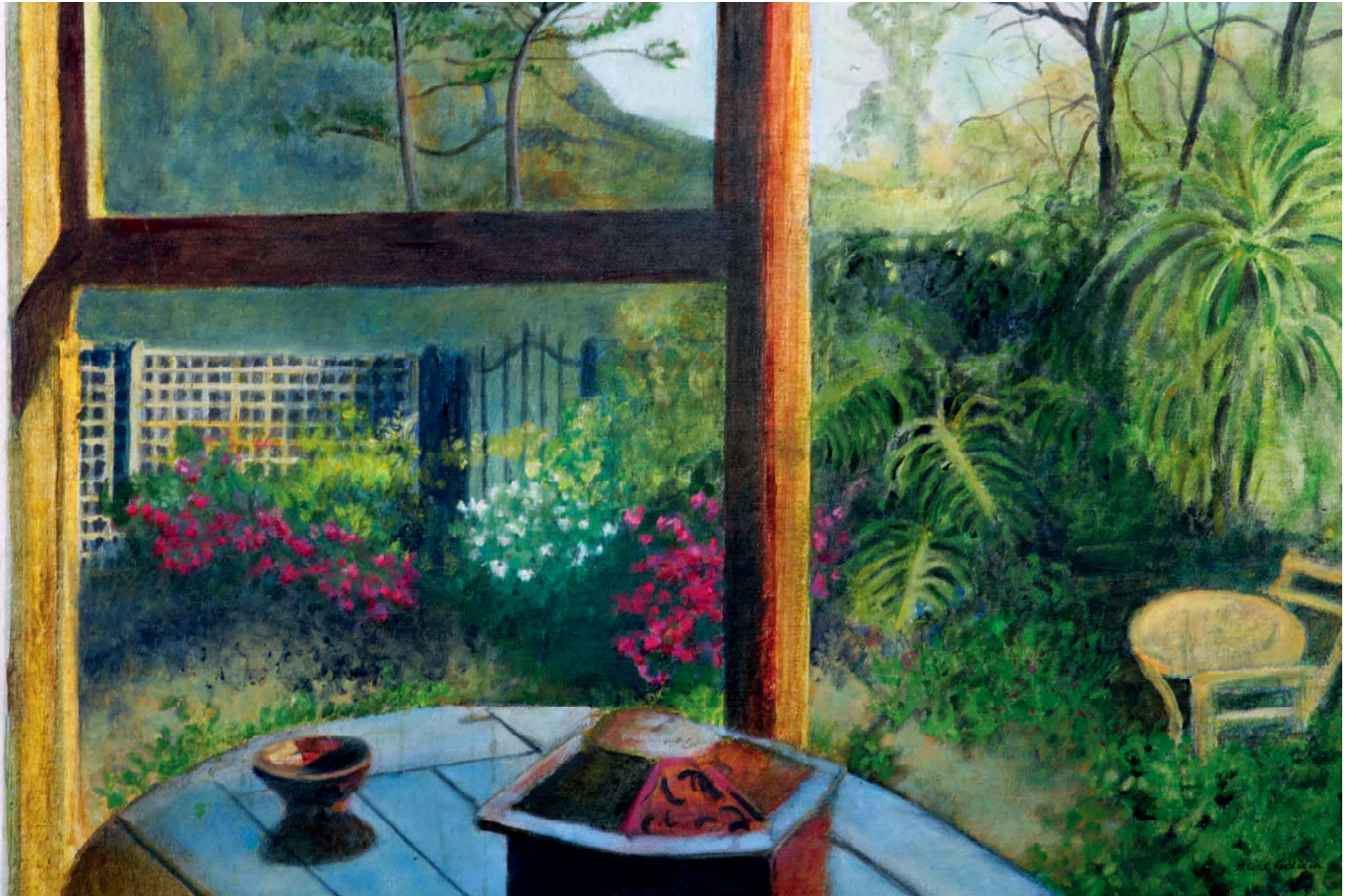
When I was expecting my daughter I decided that this might be a good time to fulfil my early dream and study art. [...] From that time my whole life was changed. Apart from art I had other responsibilities but I managed to combine both. I was lucky that I could interrupt my work and later continue where I had left off. If I had waited for a quiet moment in my life I would not have been able to do anything at all!

I joined the South African Arts Association, made friends with artists and worked with them on the Hanging Committee¹⁰. It all gave my life a new vision and purpose that has remained a vital part of me ever since.

⁹ Norman Eaton (1902–1966) was a South African Architect.

¹⁰ A group of people that selects and hangs works of art to exhibit.

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The painting "View from My Window",
tempera, emulsion and oil, 2005



Alice in the front room of
her home in Newlands,
Cape Town

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[...]

Sadly in 1958 my beloved son Alan died of leukaemia, and my dear husband Harry Goldin died two years later in 1960. I was blessed that I was able to learn to cope with the many new challenges that I now had to face for myself – and for my children.

[...]

The mystery of art

One of the advantages of not having had a formal art education is that I have not been brainwashed by teachers who insist on pupils doing what is currently considered relevant. Many times in my life, and now in my old age, art has become the core of my life and the centre of my existence, in so many ways an inspiration. [...] There is a driving force within us, but it remains impossible to understand how it works: we have the instinctive knowledge of right and wrong within us, and there is the constant search for the rhythm and harmony that relates to all of life. The older I get, the more mysterious and wonderful I find this life force, the spirit within and around us. [...] Whenever I work I put on a CD of my favourite music – classical (especially Mozart) – and I feel an uplifting peace that is at one with life and the harmony of the universe we inhabit.

My sister, Sue Hart

Since Sue was born she was a part of my life and now, as time goes by, I miss her more and more: she died in January 2010. We lived mostly apart, but we were always in touch – sometimes it was just a short “Hello” and at other times a long talk about our lives and our concerns. It always amazed me how even as children when we lived together we were very different. Perhaps because I was five years older my Austrian heritage has remained part of me all my life. [My sister, Sue, by contrast, always considered Africa her home – she loved her life here, the wild animals, the bush, the wild. She always wanted to be a vet. She studied at the Royal Veterinary College in England, and in her subsequent career she was a pioneer as a women vet in Africa.]

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“Only now I understand fully my parents’ great hardship – somehow my father earned enough for us to survive – my parents managed to give me, my sister a secure environment, protecting us from the traumas of emigration, the horrors of Nazism.”

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I still speak German and have never forgotten the ties that link me with Europe, and that remain important to me. I treasure its old buildings and artifacts and although my home has been in South Africa for a long time I still miss that part of my former life.

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Alice and her sister (2nd from left) during the opening of an exhibition in Cape Town, 1982

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Alice and her sister Sue Hart, having breakfast together in Sue's home in White River, 2003

PHOTOS: PRIVATE COLLECTION ALICE GOLDIN-COATES

“Many times in my life, and now in my old age, art has become the core of my life and the centre of my existence, in so many ways an inspiration.”



One of Alice's woodcut prints

10/15/1969

Callist

Alice Goldin

PHOTOS: PRIVATE COLLECTION ALICE GOLDIN-COATES

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Alice in her studio in Newlands, Cape Town

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