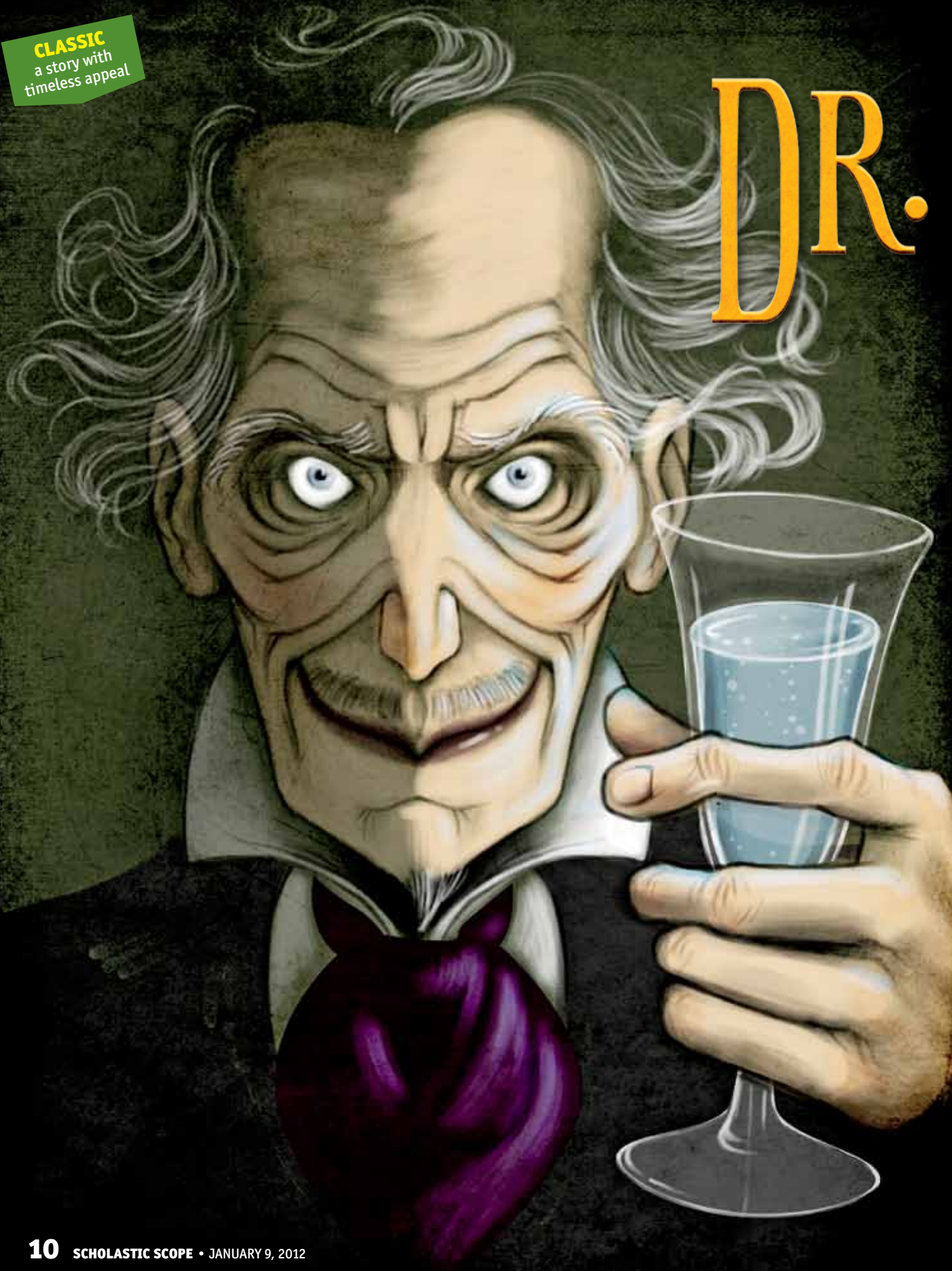


CLASSIC
a story with
timeless appeal

DR.



HEIDEGGER'S EXPERIMENT

Dr. Heidegger's water will keep you young forever. **Want a sip?**

STORY BY NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE | ADAPTATION BY SPENCER KAYDEN | ILLUSTRATIONS BY LISA K. WEBER

CHARACTERS

Circle the character you will play.

*NARRATORS 1, 2, 3, 4

(N1, N2, N3, N4)

*DOCTOR HEIDEGGER

JAMES, the doctor's butler

MR. MEDBOURNE

COLONEL KILLIGREW

MR. GASCOIGNE (GAS-KOIN)

WIDOW CLARA WYCHERLY

*Starred characters are major roles.



AS YOU READ, THINK ABOUT:
The Experiment

In this play, Dr. Heidegger convinces his friends to participate in a bizarre experiment. He wants to observe what people learn from their experiences. As you read, think about what he discovers.



SCENE 1

N1: Dr. Heidegger is a famously eccentric older gentleman.

DOCTOR: I study human nature—the way people think, feel, and act. What's so strange about that?

N2: What's strange is that the good doctor does not conduct his experiments in a laboratory.

N3: He **entices** human subjects to his home. His experiments push the

very boundaries of science.

N4: On the day our story takes place, Dr. Heidegger is sharing his latest plans with his butler.

DOCTOR: James, I am planning a special experiment.

JAMES: Oh, no! Not again.

DOCTOR: I know just the people to help me.

JAMES: Oh, dear. Who?

DOCTOR: I've invited three very old friends of mine here. Long ago, these gentlemen were all in love with the same woman—Clara. They were on the verge of cutting each other's throats for her sake.

JAMES: How long ago was this?

DOCTOR: Many decades.

JAMES: Oh, dear.

DOCTOR: I've invited Clara as well.

JAMES: Oh, dear. Oh, dear.

DOCTOR: Don't worry, James.

JAMES: Well, do be careful,



sir. The human mind is fragile.

DOCTOR: Ah, I hear the bell.

I believe our guests are here.

SCENE 2

N1: One by one, the guests enter and introduce themselves to James.

MEDBOURNE: I, Mr. Medbourne, was once a prosperous merchant—

N2: —but he lost all his money in risky business deals. Now he is **destitute**.

KILLIGREW: I, Colonel Killigrew, was a healthy, strapping man—

N3: —but a life of drinking destroyed his body. He can hardly take a step without pain.

GASCOIGNE: I, Mr. Gascoigne, was a famous politician—

N4: —more **infamous** than famous. His corruption was the talk of the town. Now he has been forgotten.

WIDOW: And I, the Widow Clara Wycherly, was once a great beauty—

N1: —but she craved attention more than true love. She broke many hearts. Now she lives alone in disgrace.

N2: The four guests express surprise at seeing each other.

WIDOW: Why have we been asked here?

JAMES: The doctor will explain. He is waiting for you. Please follow me.

SCENE 3

N3: James shows the guests into the study and shuts the doors.

N4: The study is as depressing as the guests—dim and dusty and covered with cobwebs.

N1: It is said that many bizarre

things go on in this study—that paintings move by themselves, that eerie sounds echo from the closet, and that **ghastly** faces appear in the large mirror that hangs on the wall.

MEDBOURNE (*whispering*): I have heard that this is no ordinary mirror.

DOCTOR: Indeed, Mr. Medbourne. This mirror shows more than our reflections. It reveals our true natures.

WIDOW: What is that big leather book you are holding?

GASCOIGNE: Is it a book of magic?

DOCTOR: All will be revealed. Please, take your seats.

N2: The doctor and his guests sit around a small table. On the table is a beautiful glass vase filled with glistening liquid. Four glasses are set out.

DOCTOR: My dear old friends, I have called you here to help me with a little experiment.

N3: The doctor opens the big book and takes a dried rose from between its pages.

DOCTOR: Fifty-five years ago, a woman I loved gave me this rose on the day she died. And for the past 55 years, I have kept it safe in the pages of this book.

WIDOW: I would hardly call that a rose. It's brown and crumbly.

DOCTOR: True. Now would you think it possible that this rose

could ever bloom again?

KILLIGREW: Nonsense! You might as well ask whether an old man's brittle body could dance again.

DOCTOR: Watch.

N4: The doctor puts the rose in the vase. At first, nothing happens.

N1: Then the rose starts to change.

KILLIGREW: The petals are turning crimson!

GASCOIGNE: The stem—it is turning green!

N2: Soon the rose looks as fresh as the day it was first cut.

MEDBOURNE: I don't understand.

GASCOIGNE: It's a clever trick. How did you do it?

DOCTOR: Have you heard of the Fountain of Youth? The Spanish adventurer Ponce de Leon went in search of it hundreds of years ago.

WIDOW: But did he find it?

DOCTOR: No. But an acquaintance of mine *did* find it, at the tip of the Florida peninsula. He sent me the water you see in this vase.

KILLIGREW: And what does this fluid do to the human body?

DOCTOR: Judge for yourself.

N3: The doctor pours the water into the four glasses. The water bubbles enticingly.

DOCTOR: Before you drink, consider this. Each of you was foolish in your youth. But now you have had a lifetime of experiences. It would be a shame if you had not learned from them.

MEDBOURNE: Good doctor, we have already made our mistakes in life.

GASCOIGNE: We shall not go astray again.





DOCTOR: Drink, then, and be restored to the bloom of your youth.

N4: With trembling hands, the four **decrepit** creatures raise their glasses and drink.

SCENE 4

N1: The four guests gaze at one another in amazement.

KILLIGREW: I say, Medbourne, your cheeks look pink instead of gray.

GASCOIGNE: My body feels so warm.

MEDBOURNE: I don't know when I last felt so cheerful.

N2: The widow touches her smooth forehead, shocked to find that her wrinkles are gone.

GASCOIGNE: Give us more of this wondrous water! We are younger—but we are still too old.

DOCTOR: Patience. You have been growing old for a long time. Can't you wait a little longer to grow young?

WIDOW: Quick—give us more!

N3: The doctor fills their glasses again. Each swallows the contents in a single gulp.

GASCOIGNE: Killigrew, your hair has turned from silver to black!

KILLIGREW: My dear Clara, your eyes are clear and bright.

N4: The widow runs to the mirror.

WIDOW: It's true! I am young and beautiful again!

MEDBOURNE: It's like I've come out of a nightmare in which I was broke and miserable.

GASCOIGNE: You know, I could run for office again and restore this country to its former glory. Can I count on your votes?

KILLIGREW (singing): When I drink the rosy bowl, joy will brighten up my soul!

MEDBOURNE: I've just



thought of a **surefire** way to make a fortune. I'll supply the East Indies with ice by harnessing a team of whales to the polar icebergs.

Brilliant!

N1: The widow stands in front of the mirror curtsying.

WIDOW: Oh, Clara. I haven't seen you in ages! How wonderful you look.

N2: She takes off her hat and admires the red curls that tumble to her shoulders.

N3: Meanwhile, Doctor Heidegger quietly observes their **antics**.

WIDOW: My dear doctor, don't you want to taste the water?

DOCTOR: No. I am in no hurry to grow young again.

WIDOW: Well, then, favor me with another glass!

DOCTOR: Certainly, my dear.

SCENE 5

N4: Sunset approaches, and the study is growing dark. The guests swallow glass after glass of the water.

KILLIGREW: We are young!

MEDBOURNE: No sorrow!

KILLIGREW: No disease!

GASCOIGNE: No secrets!

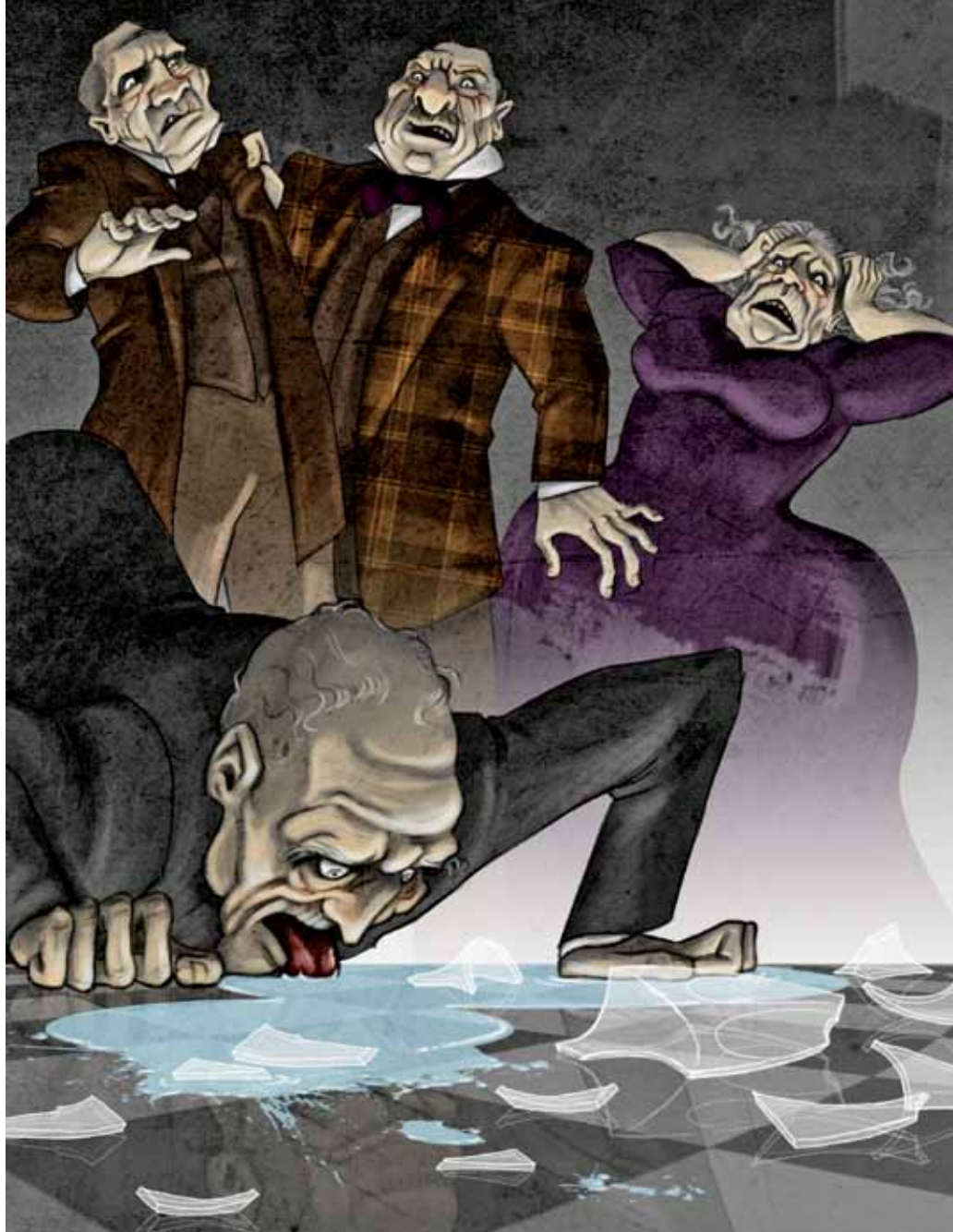
WIDOW: No regrets!

N1: They feel like new beings in a new universe.

GASCOIGNE (laughing): Can you believe how *old* we were?

N2: Mr. Medbourne limps across the room, pretending to be elderly.

MEDBOURNE: Ooh, look at me, I am



old. I am so old.

WIDOW: Dr. Heidegger, get up and dance with me!

GASCOIGNE (laughing): Can you imagine such an old man dancing?

N3: They leap around the room.

KILLIGREW: Dance with me, Clara!

GASCOIGNE: No, *I* will be her partner!

MEDBOURNE: Fifty years ago, she promised to marry *me!*

N4: They all gather around the widow as she blushes and laughs.

WIDOW: Now, now, boys.

KILLIGREW: I want you all to myself.

GASCOIGNE: She wants *ME*, not you.

MEDBOURNE: She would never choose either of you over me!

WIDOW (giggling): There is plenty of time to dance with each of you.

SCENE 6

N1: Perhaps it is the darkness of the room, but the mirror seems to reflect the figures of three **withered** old men ridiculously contending for a shriveled old lady.

N2: No one notices.

MEDBOURNE: Clara, I can buy you anything you desire.

GASCOIGNE: I can introduce you to royalty.

KILLIGREW: I will love you the most.

N3: Killigrew takes her hand.

MEDBOURNE: Get your hands off of her!

KILLIGREW: She's mine!

GASCOIGNE: No, she's mine!

MEDBOURNE: I insist, she is mine!

N4: The three men turn on each other.

MEDBOURNE: I will RUIN both of you!

GASCOIGNE: I will have you both tossed in JAIL!

KILLIGREW: I'll destroy you both with my BARE HANDS!

N1: They grab each other's throats.

N2: The doctor watches quietly as the men knock over the table, dashing the vase onto the floor and into a thousand pieces.

N3: The water from the Fountain of Youth flows in a bright stream across the floor.

N4: Killigrew drops to his knees and tries to lick up the liquid.

N1: Hearing the commotion, James runs into the room. He looks at the guests with dismay.

JAMES: Oh, dear!

N2: The doctor rescues the rose from the fragments of the shattered vase. He holds it up in the dim light of the sunset.

DOCTOR: My poor rose appears to be fading again.

N3: The four friends watch in horror as the flower shrivels and turns brown.

WIDOW: Oh, doctor, how awful—your rose has lost its beauty!

DOCTOR: Yes, but I love it as much now as I did when it first bloomed.

N4: A chill creeps over the guests.

GASCOIGNE: My body feels cold.

WIDOW: My face! It's wrinkled again.

MEDBOURNE: Are we grown old again so soon?

KILLIGREW: I feel worse than I did when I arrived.

DOCTOR: Yes, friends, you are indeed old once more.

N1: The widow throws her hands over her face.

WIDOW: How I wish a coffin lid were covering me!

DOCTOR: My friends, I must say that having seen what has happened here, I have learned an important lesson. Even if the Fountain of Youth gushed at my very doorstep, I would not stoop to drink from it.

N2: But the guests do not seem to hear the doctor.

GASCOIGNE: Listen, I have an idea. We must make a **pilgrimage** together.

MEDBOURNE: Whatever do you mean?

GASCOIGNE: To Florida! We will go to the Fountain of Youth.

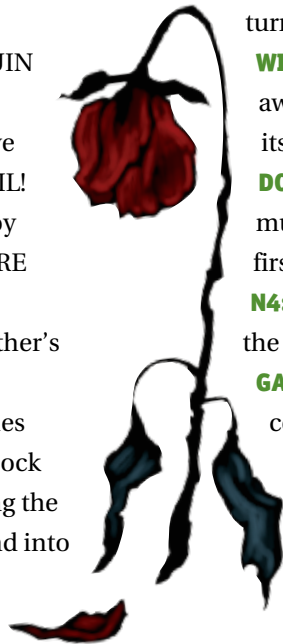
KILLIGREW: Yes! Yes! We will find it!

WIDOW: And we will drink from it morning, noon, and night.

MEDBOURNE: Just imagine!

N3: The four foolish friends **revel** in the thought of being young once more . . .

N4: . . . an obsession that consumes them until the final darkness of their dying days. ●



CONTEST

Write About Character Winston Churchill once said, "All men make mistakes, but only wise men learn from their mistakes." Explain what this quote means. Do you think Churchill would describe the characters in the play as "wise"? Use textual evidence to support your answer. Send it to **DR. H CONTEST**. Five winners will get Gemma Malley's novel *The Resistance*. See page 2 for details.



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