



*And They Moved without him* by Blackbear Bosin. The Philbrook Museum of Art, Tulsa, Oklahoma

# MAHMOUD DARWISH

## THREE POEMS

Translated by  
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والأنبياءُ جميعهم أهلي، ولكن السماءَ بعيدة  
عن أرضها، وأنا بعيدٌ عن كلامي  
والبحر ينزل تحت سطح البحر كي تطفو عظامي  
شجراً. غيابي كله شجرٌ. وبابي ظلُّه  
قمرٌ. وكنعانية أُمي. وهذا البحرُ جسراً ثابتٌ  
لعبور أيام القيامة. يا أبي، كم مرةً  
سأموتُ فوق فراشِ امرأةِ الأساطير التي  
تختارها «أنا» لي، فتشَبَّ نارٌ في الغمامِ  
كم مرةً سأموتُ في نعناعِ أحواضِ القديمة كلما  
فركته ريحُ شمالكِ العاليِ رسائلَ من يمامٍ ؟  
هذا غيابي سيّدٌ يتلو شرائعه على  
أحفادِ لوط، ولا يرى لسُدومَ مغفرةً سواي  
هذا غيابي سيّدٌ يتلو شرائعه ويسخر من رؤاي  
ما قيمةُ المرأةِ للمرأة؟ لي وجهٌ عليك، وأنت لا  
تصحو من التاريخ، لا تمحو بخارَ البحرِ عنك  
والبحرُ، هذا البحرُ، أصغرُ من خرافته وأصغرُ من يديك  
هو برزخُ البلور، أوله كآخره، ولا معنى هنا  
لدخولك العبشي في إسطورة تركتَ جيوشاً للركامِ  
ليمرَّ جيشُ آخرٍ بروي روايته ويحفرَ لاسمه  
جبلًا، ويأتي ثالثٌ ويخط سيرةَ زوجةِ خانت، ويمحو رابعٌ  
أسماءَ من سبقوا. هناك لكلِّ جيشٍ شاعرٌ  
ومؤرخٌ، وريابةٌ للراقصاتِ الساخراتِ من البداية والختام...  
وسدى أفتش عن غيابي، فهو أبسطُ من حميرِ  
الأنبياءِ تمر فوق السفحِ حاملةً سماءً للأنام...  
والبحرُ، هذا البحرُ، في متناول الأيدي، سأمشي فوقه

## ON A CANAANITE STONE AT THE DEAD SEA

*Translated by Muna Asali van Engen*

The sea opens no door before me...  
I say my poem  
is a rock flying at my father  
like a partridge. Father,  
have you heard what has happened to me?  
The sea closes no door before me.  
No mirror I can shatter makes a path  
of slivers before me  
or a path of foam. Does anyone  
weep for anyone, that I  
may carry his flute and reveal  
the secrets of my own wreckage?  
I am of the shepherds of salt  
in al-Aghwar. A bird plucks  
at my language, building a nest in my tents  
from the scattered azure.  
Is there still a country  
that flowed out of me  
so I can look at it as I wish,  
so it can look at me  
at the west coast of myself on the stone of eternity?  
This absence of yours is all trees  
looking at you from yourself

and from this smoke of mine.  
Jericho sleeps under her ancient palm tree.  
I find no one to rock her cradle.  
Their caravans grow quiet, so sleep.  
I looked for a root for my name  
but I am split apart  
by a magic wand. Do my dreams reveal  
my victims or my visions?  
All the prophets are my family,  
Yet heaven is still far from its land  
and I am far from my words.  
No wind lifts me above the past here.  
No wind tears a wave from the salt of this sea.  
There are no white flags for the dead to wave  
to surrender, no voices for the living  
to exchange declarations of peace...  
The sea carries my silver shadow at dawn  
and shepherds me to my first words,  
to the breast of the first woman.  
It lives dead in the pagan's dance  
around his space and dies alive  
by the pairing of poem and sword.  
At the crossroads of Egypt, Asia  
and the North, stranger, halt your horse  
under our palm trees. On Syrian roads,  
foreigners exchange war helmets  
bristling with basil  
sown from doves that alight  
from the houses; and the sea died  
of monotony in the undying testaments.  
I am myself if only you yourself  
were there as yourself. I am the stranger  
to the desert palm tree from the time I was born  
into this crowded mass. And I am myself.  
A war rages against me. A war rages

within me... Stranger, hang your weapons  
above our palm tree so I may plant  
my wheat in the sacred soil of Canaan...  
Take wine from my jars. Take a page  
from my gods' book. Take a portion  
of my meal and gazelle from the traps  
of our shepherds' songs.  
Take the Canaanite woman's prayers  
at the feast of her grapes. Take our customs  
of irrigation. Take our architecture.  
Lay a single brick and build up  
a tower for doves, to be one of us,  
if that's what you desire. Be a neighbor  
to our wheat. Take the stars  
of our alphabet from us, stranger.  
Write heaven's message with me  
to mankind's fear of nature and men.  
Leave Jericho under her palm tree  
but do not steal my dream, the milk  
of my woman's breast, the food  
of ants in cracks of marble!  
Have you come... then murdered... then inherited  
in order to increase the salt of this sea?  
I am myself growing greener  
with the passing of years on the oak's trunk.  
This is me and I am myself. This is my  
place in my place, and now I see you in the past  
the way you came, yet you don't see me.  
I illuminate for my present  
its tomorrow. Time sometimes separates me  
from my place, and my place separates me from my time.  
All the prophets are my family.  
Yet heaven is still far from its land  
and I am still far from my words.  
And the sea descends below sea level

so my bones float over water like trees.  
My absence is all trees. The shadow  
of my door is a moon.  
My mother is a Canaanite and this sea  
is a constant bridge to the Day of Judgment.  
Father, how many times must I die  
on the bed of the legendary woman  
Anat chose for me, so a fire  
will ignite in the clouds? How many  
times must I die in my old mint garden  
every time your high northern wind  
envelops the mint and scatters letters like doves?  
This is my absence, a master  
who reads his laws upon Lot's descendants  
and sees no pardon for Sodom  
but myself. This is my absence,  
a master who reads his laws  
and mocks my visions. Of what use  
is the mirror to the mirror?  
A bond of familiarity lies  
between us, but you will not arise  
from history, nor erase the sea steam  
from you. And the sea, this sea,  
smaller than its myth, smaller than  
your hands, is a crystalline isthmus.  
Its beginning is like its end.  
There is no sense here for your absurd entry  
in a legend that grinds armies into ruin  
just so another army may march through,  
writing its own story, carving its  
own name into a mountain. A third will come  
to chronicle the story of an unfaithful wife  
and a fourth comes to erase the names  
of our forebears. Each army has a poet  
and a historian, each a violin for the dancers,

cynical from first to last. Hopelessly, I seek  
my absence, more innocent than the donkeys  
of the prophets that tread the foothills  
carrying heaven to mankind...  
And the sea, this sea, lies  
within my grasp. I will walk  
across it, will mint its silver, will grind  
its salt in my hands. This sea is not occupied  
by anyone. Cyrus, Pharaoh, Caesar, Negus  
and the others came to write their names, with my hand,  
on its tablets. So I write: The land is in my name  
and the name of the land is the gods that share  
my place on the seat of stone. I have  
not gone, have not returned with slippery time.  
And I am myself despite my defeat.  
I have seen the coming days gilding my first trees.  
I saw my mother's spring. Father, I have seen  
her needle stitching two birds, one for her shawl  
and one for the shawl of my sister, and a butterfly  
unscalded by a butterfly for our sake. I have  
seen a body for my name. I am the male dove  
moaning in the female dove. I have seen  
our house furnished in greenery and I saw  
an entry door and an exit door  
and a door that was both.  
Has Noah passed from that place to that place  
to say about the world, " It has  
two different doors," but the horse flies with me  
and the horse flies with me higher still and I fall  
like a wave that erodes the foothills.  
Father, I am myself despite my defeat.  
I saw my days in front of me and I have seen  
among my documents a moon  
overlooking the palm trees.  
And I saw an abyss. I saw war after war.

That tribe became extinct and that tribe  
told the present Hulagu, "We're yours."  
I say, "We're not a slave nation,  
and I send my respects to Ibn Khaldun."  
I am myself despite being smashed on the metallic air.  
I have been handed over by the new Crusader war  
to the god of vengeance and the Mongol  
lurking behind the Imam's mask.  
And to the salt women in a legend  
etched into my bones. I am myself,  
if only you were my father, but I am  
a stranger to the palm trees of the desert  
from the time I was born into this crowded mass.  
And I am myself. The sea opens  
no door before me. I say my poem  
is a rock flying at my father  
like a partridge. Father,  
have you heard what has happened to me?  
The sea closes no door before me.  
No mirror I can shatter makes a path  
of its slivers before me...  
And all the prophets are my family,  
but heaven is still far from its land  
and I am far from my words.



## ELEVEN PLANETS OVER ANDALUSIA

*Translated by Clarissa Burt*

### I. LAST EVENING ON THIS EARTH

The last evening on this Earth  
we sever our days from our trellises,  
count the ribs we'll bear away with us  
and the ribs we'll leave behind.  
Here they are, on the last evening.  
We bid farewell to nothing,  
we find no time to finish,  
everything stays as it is,  
for place alters dreams as it alters visitors.  
Suddenly we can't go back to making fun  
for the place prepares to host fine dust,  
here, on the last evening.  
We contemplate mountains ringing cloud,  
invasion / counter-invasion,  
an ancient age handing over our door keys  
to the hands of this new age.  
Enter our homes, then, invaders,  
Drink the wine of our mellow ballads!  
We are night at midnight, no  
dawn carried by a knight coming  
from the last prayer-call's side.

Our tea is hot and green — drink !  
Our pistachios are fresh — Eat!  
The beds are green with cedarwood —  
give in to sleepiness!  
After this long siege, sleep on our dreams' down —  
sheets are fresh, scents at the door, and the mirrors are many.  
Enter so we may exit, then, completely.  
Soon we'll seek what our history was  
surrounding your history in distant lands.  
At last we ask ourselves, was Andalusia  
    here or there? on Earth...  
    or only in Odes?

## II. HOW DO I WRITE ABOVE THE CLOUDS?

How do I write my kinfolk's will above the clouds?  
My kin leave Time behind,  
as they leave their overcoats at home...my kin  
erect a citadel, tear it down, to raise a tent above ...  
a tent to longing for the first glimpse of palmtrees.  
Kinfolk betray my kinfolk  
in wars defending salt. But Granada is of gold,  
of silken words embroidered with almonds,  
of the silver glints of tears on lutestrings;  
Granada is for the great ascension unto her very Self.  
She may be as she wishes: longing  
for anything past or anything passing:  
a swallow's wing touching a woman's breast in bed —  
she screams: Granada is my body!  
Someone losing his gazelle in the badlands —  
he screams: Granada is my country. I'm from there!  
Sing, so goldfinches build of my ribs  
a stair to the nearest heaven,  
Sing the chivalry of those ascending  
to their death, moon by moon,  
in the loved one's alley.  
Sing the birds of the garden  
stone by stone! How much I love you,  
who cut me down sinew by sinew  
on the road to her hot night. Sing:  
"There's no morning for coffee's aroma  
after you." Sing my migration  
from the coo of mourning doves on your knee  
and from my spirit's nest  
in the letters of your liquid name:  
"Granada" belongs to song, so,  
Sing!

### III. HEAVEN BEYOND HEAVEN FOR ME

There's a heaven beyond Heaven for me, so I'll return,  
yet I polish this place's metal,  
live an hour seeing the Unseen.  
I know time will not be my ally twice.  
I know I'll emerge from my banner a bird  
alighting not on garden trees.  
I'll emerge from my whole skin. From my language  
some Love words will come down in the poetry of Lorca  
who'll dwell in my bedroom, see  
what I've seen of the bedouin moon.  
I'll emerge from almond trees, cottonfluff on seafoam.  
A stranger passed by bearing  
seven hundred years of horsepower.  
A stranger passed by here so that a stranger may pass by there.  
I'll emerge yet awhile from my time's wrinkles,  
to Sham and to Andalusia a stranger.  
This earth is not my heaven, yet  
this evening is my evening.  
The keys belong to me, the minarets and lamps,  
even I belong to me.  
I am Adam of two Edens  
twice lost to me;  
Expel me easy —  
Kill me easy  
under my olive tree  
with Lorca.

#### **IV. I'M ONE OF THE KINGS OF THE END**

I'm one of the kings of the end...in the last winter  
I leap off my mare; I am Arab man's last gasp.  
I don't look down upon myrtle over rooftops,  
I don't look I around me lest someone see me here  
who knows me, who knew me when I polished word marble  
my woman crosses barefoot over dappled light.  
I don't look out at night lest I see  
a moon that kindled all Granada's secrets,  
body by body. I don't look at shadow lest I see  
one bearing my name running after me.  
Take your name from me, give me the silver of poplars!  
I don't turn behind me lest I be  
reminded I passed over the earth.  
There is no earth on this earth,  
since time broke around me sliver by sliver  
I was no lover believing that water is a mirror.  
I said to my old friends: No love puts in a good word for me  
since I accepted The Settlement Accord . No longer  
is there a present, so I pass tomorrow near yesterday.  
Castille will raise her crown above Allah's minaret.  
I hear the tinkling of keys  
in our golden history's doorway.  
I bid farewell to our history.  
Who will close the last door to heaven?  
I, Arab man's last gasp.

## V. ONE DAY I'LL SIT ON THE SIDEWALK

One day I'll sit on the sidewalk... a stranger's sidewalk —  
I'm no Narcissus, yet I defend my image in mirrors...  
Weren't you here once before, stranger?  
Five hundred years past and gone; the break  
isn't over completely between us here!  
Letters never stopped between us, wars  
didn't change the gardens of Granada. One day  
I'll pass by her moons, brush my desire with lemon:  
Embrace me that I may be born again  
of scents, of sun, and the river on your shoulders,  
of two feet scratching the evening  
so that it weep milk tears for the evening of the Ode!  
I was no passerby in the singer's words...  
I was the singers' words:  
the Peace of Athens and Persia,  
east embracing west,  
on a journey to the single essence.  
Embrace me that I may be born again  
of Damascene swords in shops!  
Nothing remains of me but my old armor,  
my horse's gold-worked saddle,  
Nothing but a manuscript of Averroes,  
*The Dove's Necklace*, translated works.  
I would sit on the sidewalk of the Square of black-eyed susans  
counting pigeons, one, two, thirty... girls  
who snatch bush shadows on marble  
and leave me leaves of a lifetime, yellow.  
Autumn passed me over, I didn't notice  
the whole autumn passing,  
as our history passed over the sidewalk.  
I didn't notice.

## VI. REALITY IS TWO-FACED/SNOW IS BLACK

Reality is two-faced. Snow falls black over our city.  
We can despair no more than we've despaired,  
The end walks to the wall, steadfast in its footsteps,  
above this tile wet with tears, steadfast in its footsteps.  
Who will take down our flags: we or they? And who  
will read The Settlement Accord aloud to us, O King of Dying?  
Everything is prepared for us from of old;  
who will yank out our names  
from our identity? You or they?  
Who will plant in us the Wilderness' Sermon?:  
"We could not break the siege  
so we surrender the keys of our paradise  
to the Minister of Peace, and survive."  
Reality is two-faced — the sacred slogan was a sword  
for us and against us. What did you do  
with our citadel before this light of day?  
You didn't fight because you fear martyrdom;  
Your throne is your bier —  
Bear the bier to preserve your throne, O King of Waiting.  
This peace will leave us handfuls of dust.  
Who will bury our days after us: You ... or they? Who  
will raise their banners above our walls:  
you ... or a desperate knight?  
Who hangs their bells upon our journey  
you ... or a wretched guard?  
Everything is prepared for us —  
Why prolong the speech, O King of Dying?

## VII. WHO AM I AFTER THE STRANGER'S NIGHT?

Who am I after the stranger's night? I rise from my dream  
fearing day's obscurity on the marble of home,  
sun's darkness on the rose, my fountain's water,  
fearing milk on the lip of figs, fearing my language,  
fearing the breeze which combs the willow, fearing, *fearing*  
the clarity of time condensed, and a present  
no longer present, fearing my passage  
over a world no longer mine.

Despair, be a mercy; O Death be a boon  
to the stranger who sees the Unseen clearer  
than a reality no longer real, I will fall from a star  
in the heavens to a tent on the road to...where?

Where is the road to anything? I see the Unseen clearer  
than a street no longer mine. Who am I after the stranger's night?  
I would walk to the very Self in Others, but here am I  
losing Self as well as Others.

My horse on the Atlantic coast disappeared;  
my horse on the Mediterranean sinks the crusader's spear in me.

Who am I after the stranger's night? I cannot return  
to my siblings near the palm tree of my old house,  
I cannot descend to the bottom of my abyss;

Love has no heart, no  
loving heart to dwell in  
after the stranger's night.



### VIII. BE STRING, WATER, TO MY GUITAR

Be string, water, to my guitar;  
conquerors come, conquerors go...  
It's hard to remember my face in mirrors.  
Be my memory so I can see what I have lost...  
Who am I after this collective exodus?  
I have a boulder bearing my name  
on a rise looking over what is done and gone;  
seven hundred years accompany me beyond the city wall.  
Vainly time turns around to save my past from a moment  
giving birth now to the history  
of my exile in others and in me.  
Be string, water, to my guitar,  
Conquerors come, Conquerors go  
southwards as nations, rotting  
in the compost of transformation.  
I know who I was yesterday,  
so what am I to be tomorrow  
under Columbus' Atlantic banners? Be string,  
to my guitar, water, be string;  
There is no Misr in Misr, no  
Fez in Fez, and Syria is far off;  
no hawk is on the banner of my kin,  
No river runs east of the palm tree besieged  
by the Mongolian's swift horses.  
In which Andalusia did he end?  
Here in this place?  
Or there? I will know that I have perished, leaving here  
the best of what is in me: my past.  
Nothing remains to me but my guitar.  
Be string, water, to my guitar.  
conquerors come, conquerors go.

## **IX. IN THE GREAT MIGRATION I LOVE YOU MORE**

In the Great Migration I love you more;  
in a while you'll lock the city.  
No heart have I in your hands, nor any path  
to carry me — In the Great Migration I'll love you more.  
The pomegranate of our balcony has no milk after your breast.  
Palm trees have grown light,  
the weight of hills has grown light,  
our streets grew light in the late afternoon,  
earth grew light since it bid its earth farewell.  
Words grew light, tales grew light on the stair of night.  
Yet my heart is heavy.  
Leave it here howling around your house,  
bemoaning the beautiful time that I have no homeland but...  
In Migration I love you more —  
I empty the spirit of last words: I love you more  
in Migration. Butterflies lead our spirits. In Migration  
we remember the shirtbutton we lost, we forget  
the crown of our days, we remember  
the scent of apricot sweat, we forget  
the dance of horses on our wedding nights.  
In Migration we are equal with birds,  
we have mercy on our days, we suffice with little.  
From you, I suffice with the golden dagger  
dancing in the slain one's heart.  
Slay me slowly, so I may say I love you more  
than I said before the Great Migration.  
I love you. Nothing pains me —  
neither breeze, nor water, nor the basil plant in your morning,  
nor a lily in your evening pains me,  
after this Migration.

## **X. ALL I WANT OF LOVE IS A BEGINNING**

All I want of love is a beginning; pigeons mend  
the dress of day above my Granada's courtyards,  
in jars of wine for the feastedays that come after us.  
In songs are openings enough for pomegranates to burst forth.

I leave jasmine in the flowerpot, I leave my small heart  
in my mother's cupboard, I leave dreams in water, laughing,  
I leave the dawn in fig honey, I leave my today, my yesterday  
in the corridor to the Orange Courtyard where pigeons fly.

Am I the one who went down to your feet, so words would rise  
as a moon in the milk of your nights, bathed in white?... Beat the air!  
so I may see Reedflute Street, bathed in blue...Beat the evening!  
so I may see how this marble grew ill between me and you.

The windows are empty of your shawl's gardens. Another time  
I would know all about you, pluck a gardenia  
from your ten fingers. Another time I had pearls around  
your towering neck, a name ring from which dark rays forth.

All I want of love is a beginning; pigeons flew  
above the ceiling of the last heaven; pigeons flew and flew!  
There will be lots of wine, after us, in jars;  
A little earth suffices us for meeting, and peace descends.

## **XI. VIOLINS**

Violins weep with gypsies going to Andalusia,  
Violins weep over Arabs leaving Andalusia.

Violins weep over time lost, no turning back,  
Violins weep over a homeland lost, perhaps to return.

Violins burn the forests of that deep, deep darkness,  
Violins bleed butcher knives, smell my jugular blood.

Violins weep with gypsies going to Andalusia,  
Violins weep over Arabs leaving Andalusia.

Violins are horses on a gut-string of mirage, of keening water,  
Violins are a field of beastly lilac, far flung, drawing near.

Violins are beasts tortured by a woman's nail which touched  
    then withdrew,  
Violins are an army peopling a cemetery of marble and melody.

Violins are hearts' chaos crazed by wind in the dancer's foot,  
Violins are birdflocks fleeing a defective flag.

Violins are the complaint of curled silk in the lover's night,  
Violins are the sound of wine harking back to an earlier desire.

Violins follow me, here, there, to wreak vengeance on me,  
Violins seek me to kill me, wherever they find me.

Violins weep over Arabs leaving Andalusia,  
Violins weep with gypsies going to Andalusia.

## ALL I WANT TO SEE

*Translated by Noel Abdulahad*

### 1

I see all I want to see of the field:  
Tresses of wheat combed by the wind.  
I close my eyes:  
This mirage only leads to a melody—  
This silence only leads to a blue twilight.

### 2

I see all I want to see of the sea:  
Gulls flying through sunset.  
I close my eyes:  
This loss leads to Andalusia—  
This sail is pigeons' prayers  
pouring down on me.

### 3

I see all I want to see of the night:  
A long trip's end  
hanging around a city gate.  
I will leave my diaries behind

in sidewalk cafes—  
I will give this nowhere  
a seat on one of the ships.

4

I see all I want to see of the soul:  
Face of stone etched by lightning.  
You're so green, my land!  
So green, O my soul's land!  
Wasn't I that child playing  
    near the lip of the well,  
still playing?  
This space is my courtyard.  
These stones are my winds.

5

I see all I want to see of peace:  
A deer, a pasture and a stream.  
I close my eyes:  
The deer is sleeping in my arms—  
His hunter is asleep in a faraway place  
near his children.

6

I see all I want to see of war:  
A spring of water  
Our forefathers squeezed  
from a green stone.  
Our fathers inherited the water  
but they do not give it to us.  
I close my eyes:  
What is left of the land

I made with my own hands.

**7**

I see all I want to see of prison:  
Days of a flower  
That guided two strangers from here  
To a garden seat.  
I close my eyes:  
You are so vast, O land,  
so wondrous seen through the needle's eye!

**8**

I see all I want to see of lightning:  
Profusion of vegetation rent by weeds.  
Hail to the almond's song flowing white  
over village smoke, as flocks of pigeons  
sharing our children's food.

**9**

I see all I want to see of love:  
Horses inspiring the plains to dance  
and fifty guitars sighing,  
swarms of bees sucking blackberries.  
I close my eyes  
to see our shadows  
behind this restless place.

**10**

I see all I want to see of death:  
In love, my chest splits open  
and the white horse of Eros bolts out of it,

gallops above infinite cloud,  
races with the eternal blue.  
Don't stop me from dying!  
Don't return me to an earthly star.

**11**

I see all I want to see of blood:  
The murdered addressing his murderer  
the moment a bullet lights up his heart:  
From now on you can remember only me.  
I murdered you by mistake  
so you will remember only me.  
You can't tolerate Spring roses.

**12**

I see all I want to see of the theatre of the absurd:  
The beasts, the judges, the emperor's hat,  
the masks of the Age, the color of the ancient sky,  
the palace dancer, the unruly armies,  
I want to forget them all!  
I just want to remember  
the dead piled high behind the curtain.

**13**

I see all I want to see of poetry:  
We used to wear garlands of flowers  
and follow the funeral procession of  
our martyred poets, then come back  
safe and sound to their poems.  
But in this tabloid age of cinemas and  
    buzzing noises  
we jeer as we bury their poems in heaps of dust



then glimpse them waiting in doorways for us  
when we return home.

**14**

I see all I want to see of the dawn at dawn:  
Many search in other people's bread  
for their daily bread.  
It's bread, bread  
that wakes us from our naps and fluffy dreams!  
Does life's dawn and war's dawn  
peep out at us from a tiny kernel of wheat?

**15**

I see all I want to see of people:  
Their nostalgic desire for anything and everything,  
their slow pace when going to work,  
their fast pace when coming home,  
their incessant need to be told:  
*Good morning!*

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