

Baker Street Elementary

Presents
"The Life and Times in Victorian London"



Baker Street Elementary

& The Victorian Web

The Life and Times in Victorian London

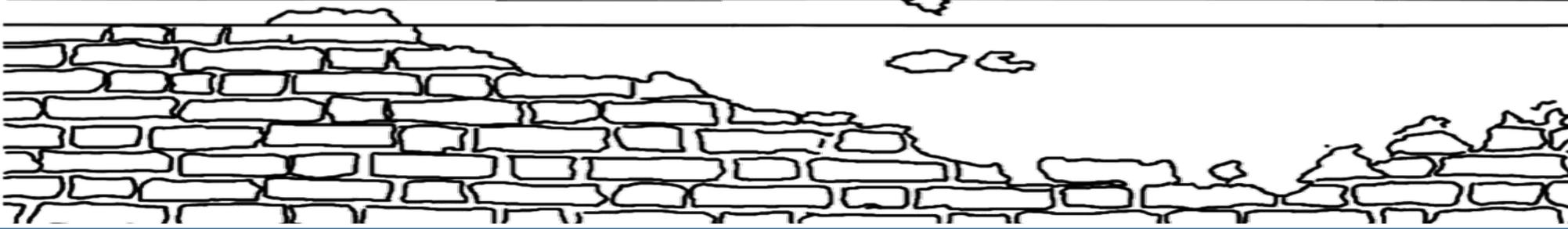
084 - Genteel Woman Seeks Employment -- 11/18/2018



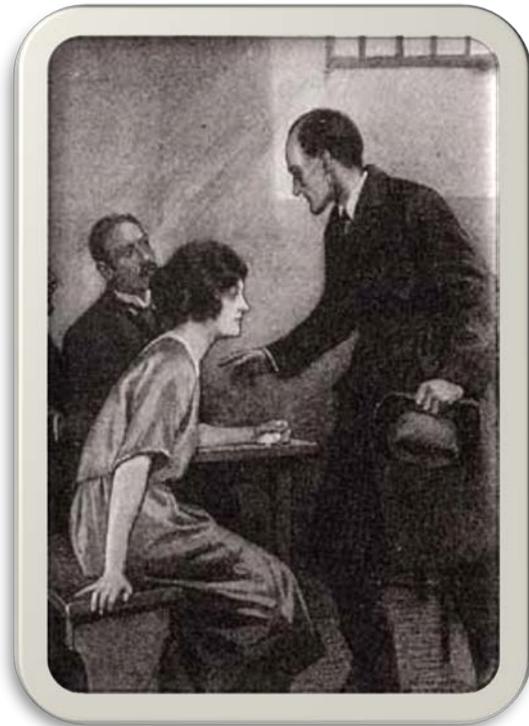
Welcome to topic number 84... Today and Miss Lyndsay and I will be looking at governesses during our period.



Six governesses will appear in the canon: Mary Morstan in "The Sign of the Four," Violet Hunter in "The Adventure of the Copper Breeches"...



...Violet Smith in "The Adventure of the Solitary Cyclist," Miss Burnet in "The Adventure of Wisteria Lodge," Miss Dobney in "The Disappearance of Lady Carfax" and Grace Dunbar in "The Adventure of Thor Bridge."



*Their fictional circumstances
will reflect common problems
true-life Victorian governesses
face in their job.*



For the well-educated, unmarried middle-class woman, the post of governess is one of few occupations open to someone of her status.



These women often select the profession following the loss or bankruptcy of their father or brother or when faced with a lack of marital prospects.



During the 1800s, women outnumber the men in Britain, and by enough that many seek employment as the only means of sustaining themselves.





*In 1850, it was estimated
20,000 serve as
governesses, with more
seeking work than there are
opportunities.*



Such a surplus depress salaries to about 35 pounds a year, not including clothing, laundry, medical or other expenses.





When Violet Hunter and Violet Smith are offered 100-120 pounds per year (noted as double or more the usual fee), it is not surprising they find it too much to resist—despite the rather suspicious circumstances under which it is offered.



Women can advertise their interest in a position or use an agency such as Violet Hunter do to find a job.



The Governesses' Benevolent Institution, created in 1843, provides a registry of governesses and even offers special services to those out of work.



In part, the organization is created to recognize the social class of these women, marking them as different from working class servants placed by other agencies.



At the same time, while her education marks her as above the other household servants, the governess's paid status separates her from the family she serves.



*Hers is often a very lonely existence
outside of work.*

*Depending on the household, she might eat
her meals with the children or possibly
dine with the family, as Miss Burnet did,
when no company is present.*





*But the other servants do
not welcome her in their
common sitting room.*





Thus, Mary Morstan's relationship with her employer—described by Watson as a "friendship"— will be out of the ordinary and hinted at her special character.



Middle- and upper-class families hire governesses to provide instruction to both sexes until the boys are sent to prep or public schools.



*Instruction continue for girls
in subjects as varied as
English, history, geography
and conversational French.*



Governesses are also expected to provide lessons in art, piano, and singing as well as the social graces required of young Victorian women.

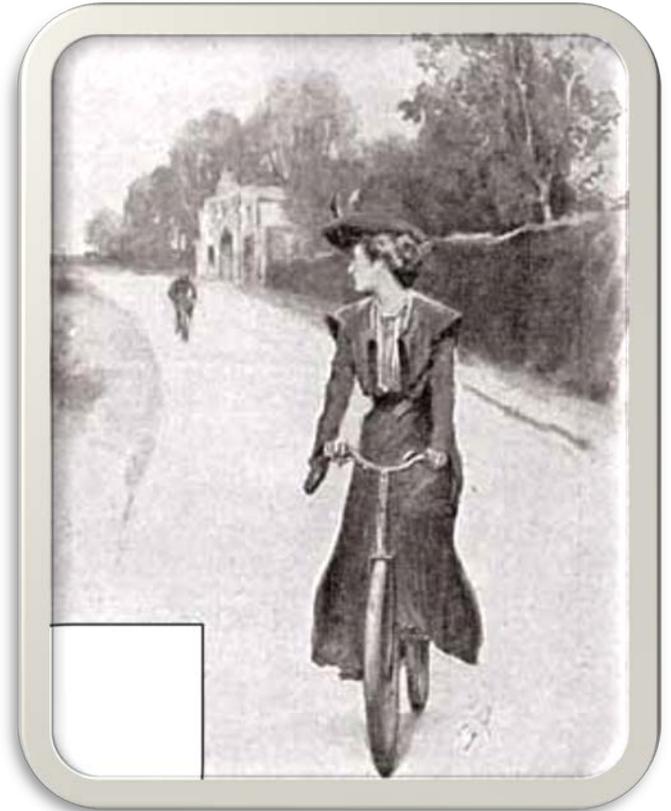


Violet Hunter will have a six-year-old boy to teach and lists her "accomplishments" as including French, German, music, and drawing.



Miss Burnet will teach two girls, aged 11 and 13, and Grace Dunbar will have two children under her care.

Violet Smith will have a ten-year-old girl for her pupil.



Depending on the number and ages of the children, a governess may spend years in the same household (often until the youngest child left home) and develop a deep attachment to her pupils.

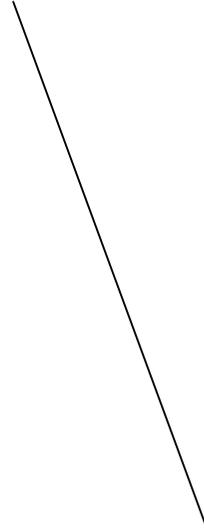


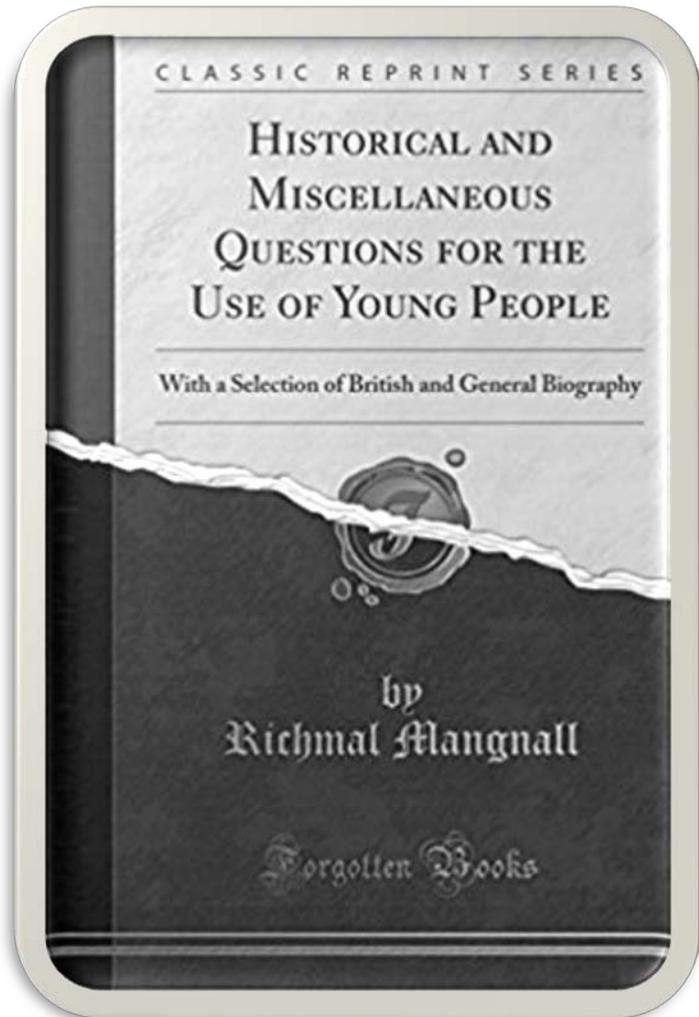
*Lady Carfax, for example,
will keep in contact with
Miss Dobney even after
her governess retires.*





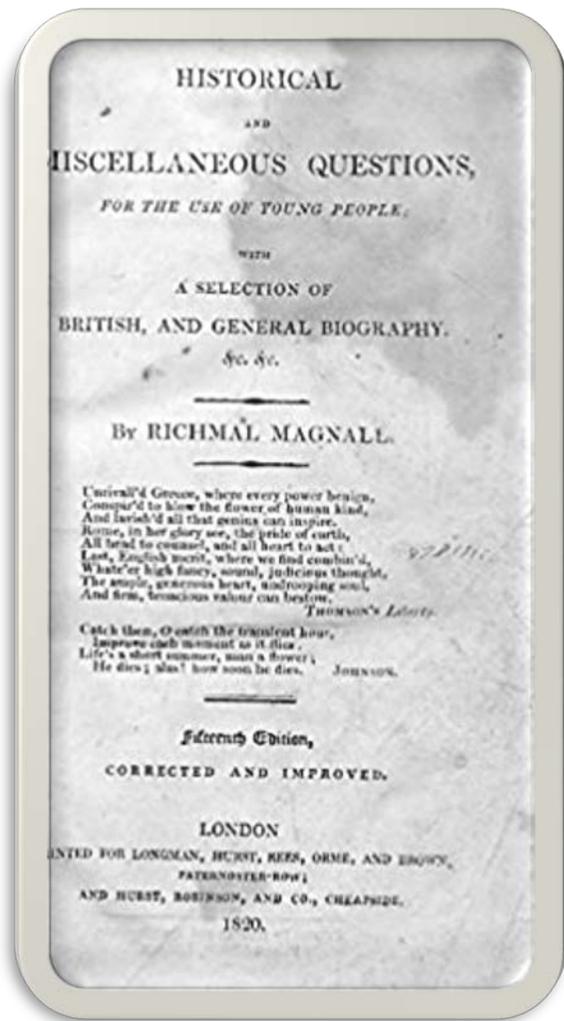
*Not all governesses, however,
are as well-prepared as those
in the Canon.*





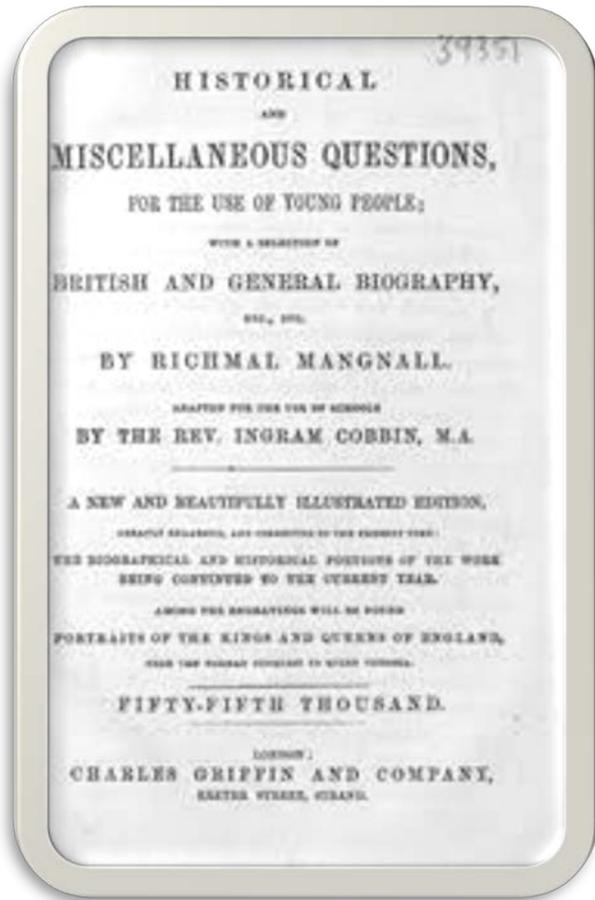
If they lacked the background needed to cover what is expected, they may rely on teachers' manuals, such as Richmal Mangnall's Historical and Miscellaneous Questions for the Use of Young People.





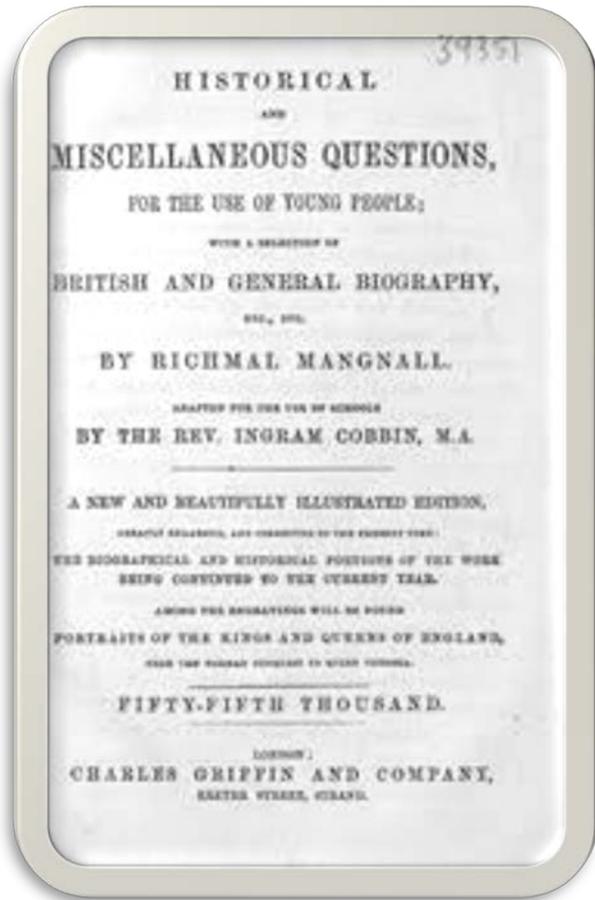
The desperate governess may have her students memorize one or two pages each day of the book's questions and answers that covered everything from History to Mythology to Heraldry and Astronomy.





For example, from the first page under "Scriptural History," a student's response to the question "How came this world into being?"...





... is given as "In the beginning the great God made heaven and earth and all things that are in them."



If fortunate, the governess may be supported by a special governess or tutor brought in to cover certain subjects.



Violet Smith, for example, will be hired to teach music to Woodley's daughter.

She mentions no responsibilities for other lessons.



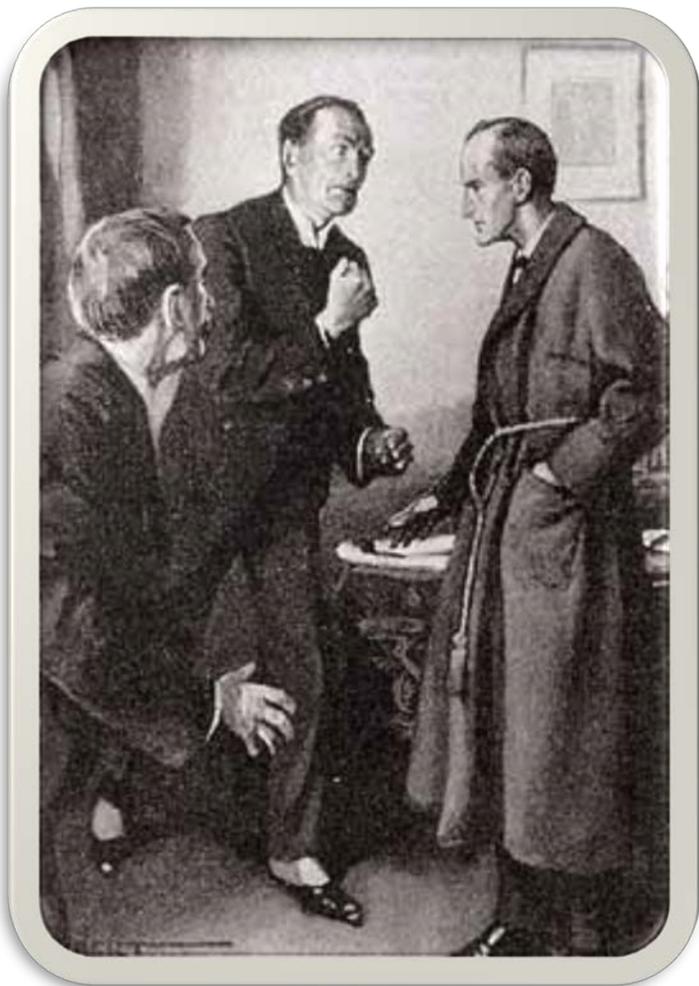
It is also not unheard of for the governess to find herself at the mercy of the male family members.



*Not all are as lucky as Jane Eyre to
marry their employer.*

*Grace Dunbar and Violet Smith both will
be forced to reject their employer's
advances to their own detriment.*

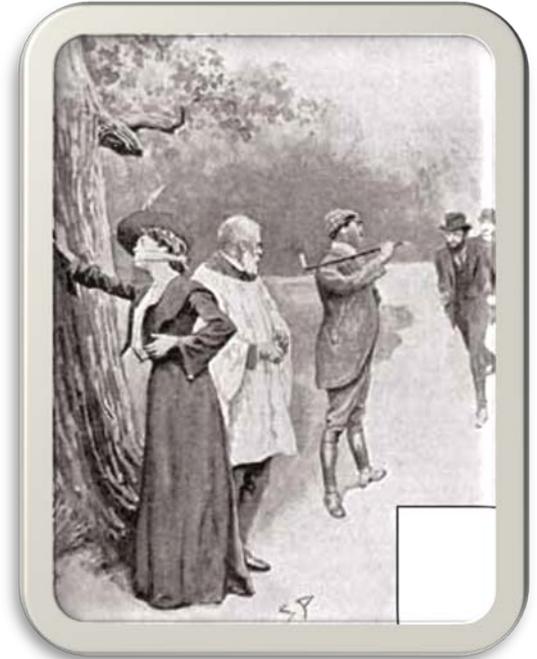




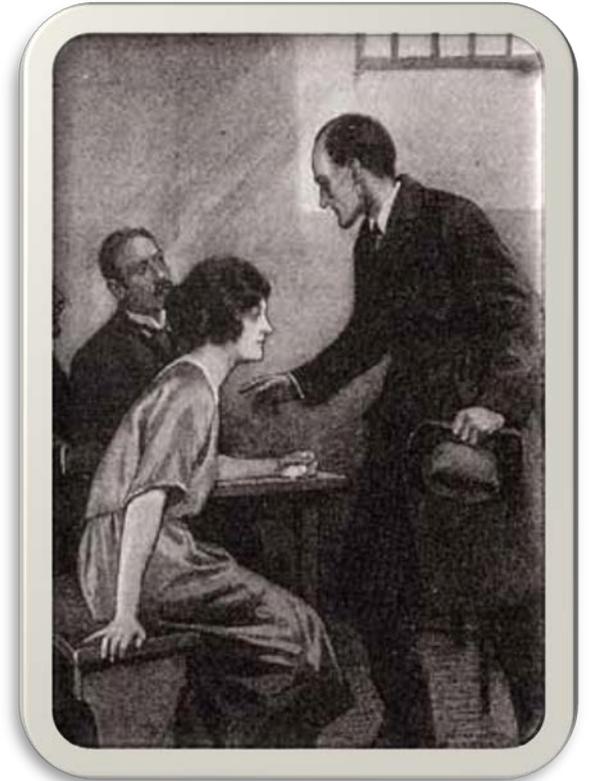
More than one young employee will have agreed to Holmes's accusation of Mr. Gibson's actions toward Miss Dunbar: "you have tried to ruin a defenceless girl who was under your roof."



Given some of the difficulties these genteel and educated women face, it will not be surprising their predicaments will have struck a chord within Holmes.

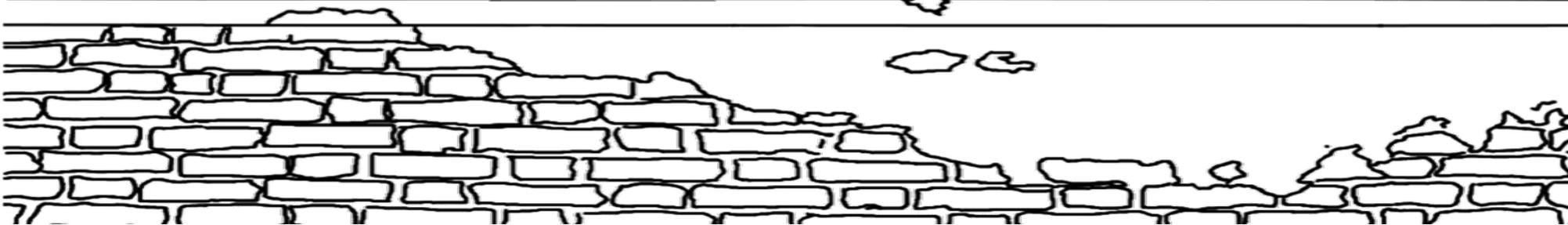


*And the detective, always a gentleman
in such circumstances, will have felt
honor-bound to assist them.*



*So we have completed topic 84 in
our series...*

*Yes, but we'll be back
with another topic
soon...*



Original Source Material for this topic:

- Daniel Pool, *What Jane Austen Ate and Charles Dickens Knew*, New York: Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1993, page 224.
- Sally Mitchell, editor, *Victorian Britain: An Encyclopedia*, New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1988, page 337.
- Martha Vicinus, editor, *Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age*, New York: Indiana University Press, 1972, page 17.
- Richmal Mangnall, *Historical and Miscellaneous Questions*, New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1853, page 9.



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"The Life and Times in Victorian London"

IS CREATED THROUGH THE INGENUITY & HARD WORK OF:

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*WE ARE EXTREMELY
THANKFUL TO LIESE AND
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OF THIS PROJECT...*

