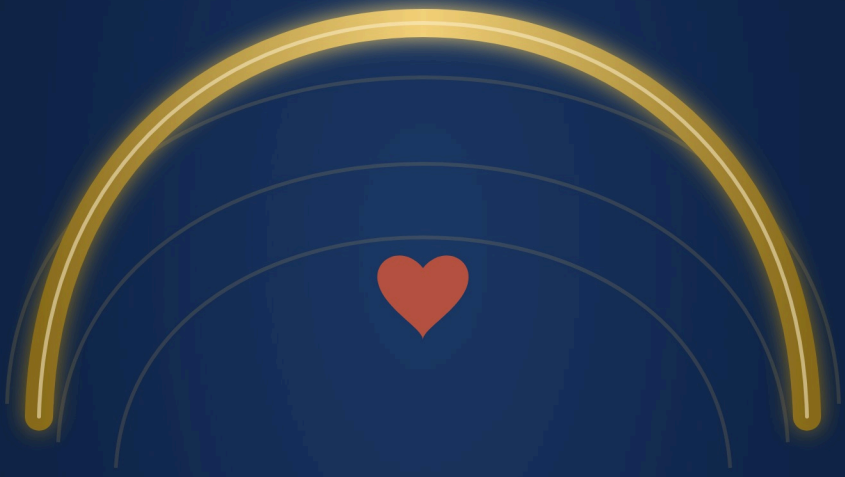
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THE CURVED RIB

Why Woman Was Made Differently, Why She Outlives Man, and Why Technology Could Erase Her

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Biblical quotations follow the King James Version. Translations from the Qur'an and the hadith are by Global Strategy Files and render the sense of the Arabic. Original data analysis uses the World Bank World Development Indicators.

First edition, November 2026.

"It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him."

GENESIS 2:18

"If you try to straighten it, you will break it; and if you leave it, it will remain curved. So treat women well."

HADITH REPORTED BY AL-BUKHARI AND MUSLIM

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Executive Summary

This book makes one argument and tests it against three kinds of evidence. The argument is that the oldest image of woman's origin, a being drawn from a rib, contains a precise description of how female life actually works. The rib is paired. It regrows. It is curved. It guards the heart. And, like every curve, it has weak points. Read as a lens rather than as a proof, these five properties organise a surprising amount of what scripture, biology and psychology have to say about the difference between women and men.

The texts. Genesis contains two creation accounts, not one, and the first creates man and woman together. The Hebrew word usually rendered "rib", *tsela*, more often means "side". The Qur'an never mentions a rib at all: it speaks of humanity created "from a single soul" and of the spouse created from it. The rib enters Islamic tradition through a hadith whose central image is not inferiority but curvature: a bone that breaks if forced straight. The oldest parallel, a Sumerian poem, names a goddess Nin-ti, "Lady of the Rib", whose name also means "Lady who makes live".

The biology. Women carry two X chromosomes; men carry one X and a Y that has shrunk from about 900 genes to about 55. Across 229 animal species, the sex with two matching sex chromosomes lives 17.6 percent longer on average. In wild mammals females outlive males by 18.6 percent; in humans the figure is 7.8 percent. In every one of the 196 countries for which the World Bank reports infant mortality by sex but

one, baby boys die more often than baby girls, and the median excess is 22 percent.

The crises. In seven historical catastrophes where life expectancy fell to 20 years or less, women outlived men in six. Global Strategy Files (GSF) analysis of World Bank data for 215 countries shows that in 2020, among the 165 countries where life expectancy fell, men lost more years than women in 137. But the advantage has limits: in the Haiti earthquake of 2010 it almost vanished, and in wars it explodes because men are killed in combat.

The mind. Most psychological differences between the sexes are small. A few are large, above all interest in people rather than things. Women are about twice as likely as men to be diagnosed with depression, yet men die by suicide at roughly twice the rate of women worldwide, and at a higher rate in every one of the 184 countries with data. We call this pattern bending without breaking.

The heart. Global female life expectancy rose from 52.6 years in 1960 to 75.9 in 2024; male life expectancy from 49.3 to 71.1. The gap widened from 3.3 to 4.9 years. In 1960 men outlived women in five countries; since 1995 women have outlived men everywhere, apart from one isolated year in one country. GSF regression analysis across 114 countries finds that if men smoked, drank and killed one another at women's rates, the average gap would fall from 5.5 years to about 1.7. That residue matches what demographers found among Bavarian monks and nuns.

The cracks. Women live longer but report more illness, account for about 80 percent of autoimmune disease, and were long excluded from the medical trials that set their doses. Where culture prefers sons, it can

override biology entirely: the United Nations estimates 142.6 million "missing" women in 2020.

The future. Technology is now attacking the functions that defined woman in every tradition. Artificial wombs are approaching human trials for extreme prematurity. Eggs have been made from human skin cells. Sex selection, artificial companions and collapsing fertility could shrink women's demographic, economic and symbolic place. Biologically, the chromosome that is disappearing is the Y. Culturally and technologically, the risk runs the other way. GSF assigns a 45 percent probability to a 2075 world in which the curve holds, and 55 percent to three scenarios in which woman is, in different ways, made less necessary.

The Curved Rib in Twenty Numbers

Twenty numbers behind the Curved Rib Thesis

Figure	What it measures	Source
About 21	Uses of *ezer*, "helper", in the Hebrew Bible; most of them refer to God	Hebrew Bible
0	Mentions of a rib in the Qur'an	Qur'an
900 to 55	Genes on the Y chromosome, ancestral pair to today	Graves
17.6%	Longer life of the sex with two matching sex chromosomes, 229 species	Xirocostas et al. 2020
18.6% vs 7.8%	Female lifespan advantage in wild mammals vs humans	Lemaître et al. 2020
1.22	Median ratio of boys' to girls' infant mortality, 196 countries, 2024	GSF, World Bank
14 to 19 years	Extra life of Korean court eunuchs compared with similar men	Min et al. 2012
27 years	Longest persistence of a son's cells found in a mother's blood	Bianchi et al. 1996
10.9 vs 7.3	Life expectancy of girls and boys born in the Ukrainian famine of 1933	Zarulli et al. 2018
137 of 165	Countries where men lost more life expectancy than women in 2020	GSF, World Bank
1.95	Odds ratio of depression diagnosis, women to men	Salk et al. 2017
184 of 184	Countries where men's suicide rate exceeds women's, 2021	GSF, World Bank
52.6 to 75.9	Women's world life expectancy, 1960 to 2024	GSF, World Bank
49.3 to 71.1	Men's world life expectancy, 1960 to 2024	GSF, World Bank
5 to 0	Countries where men outlived women, 1960 and today	GSF, World Bank
5.5 to 1.7 years	Average gap, actual and with equal habits, 114 countries	GSF model
1 year	Gap between Bavarian nuns and monks	Luy 2003
80%	Share of autoimmune disease patients who are women	Klein and Flanagan 2016
142.6 million	Missing women in the world, 2020	UNFPA 2020

Figure	What it measures	Source
45% vs 55%	GSF probability that the curve holds in 2075, against the three other worlds	GSF scenarios

Source: As listed. GSF denotes Global Strategy Files calculations.

How to Read This Book

The book has seven parts. Part I reads the rib in the texts. Parts II to V follow the four strengths of the curve: redundancy, regeneration, flexibility and the protection of the heart. Part VI looks at where the curve cracks. Part VII asks whether technology will still need the rib at all.

Three kinds of evidence run through every chapter, and they are never mixed without warning. When we report what a scripture says, we quote it and give the reference. When we report a scientific finding, we name the study. When we offer our own reading, we say so. The image of the curved rib is a lens. It does not prove anything, and no theological claim in this book rests on a biological fact, or the reverse.

All original calculations are labelled GSF. They use World Bank World Development Indicators for 215 countries and territories from 1960 to 2024. World averages are weighted by population. The methods are described in Appendix A, and a country table is given in Appendix B. Biblical quotations follow the King James Version. Translations from the Qur'an and the hadith are our own and give the sense of the Arabic; readers should consult a scholarly translation for devotional use.

Prologue: The First Thing That Was Not Good

In the first chapter of Genesis, everything is good. Light is good, the dry land is good, the plants and the stars and the animals are good, and when humanity appears the whole of creation is "very good". Then, in the second chapter, the tone changes. A man stands alone in a garden, and for the first time in the Bible God says that something is *not* good: "It is not good that the man should be alone" (Genesis 2:18).

Everything this book is about begins with that sentence. The first problem in the biblical world is not sin, death or disobedience. It is solitude. And the solution is not a copy of the man but a difference: a being taken from his side, made of the same substance, standing in front of him rather than behind him. The difference between woman and man begins, in this story, as an answer to loneliness.

For three thousand years, readers have argued about what that difference means. Some saw in the rib a sign that woman is secondary, an afterthought, a part of a whole. Others saw equality: made from the side, not from the head to rule nor from the feet to be trampled. Theologians, jurists and preachers built entire social orders on one reading or the other. In the last century, scientists entered the argument with chromosomes, hormones and brain scans, and psychologists with questionnaires and meta-analyses. Most of them assumed the old story had nothing to teach them.

This book starts from the opposite assumption. It asks a simple question that, as far as we can tell, has never been asked systematically: what if the rib was the right bone? What if the physical properties of that bone (it comes in pairs, it grows back, it bends, it protects the heart, and it can crack) describe with unusual accuracy what we now know about female life?

The question sounds like poetry, and in part it is. But it turns out to be a productive way of organising evidence. Women carry a second copy of the X chromosome, as the rib cage carries pairs. Women repair and resist infection more vigorously, as the rib is one of the few human bones that regenerates over large distances. Women report more distress yet break less often under it, as a curved beam absorbs loads that would snap a straight one. Women's hearts are protected for decades by their hormones, as the ribs stand guard over the heart. And women pay for these strengths with specific weaknesses, as every curve has a point where it fails.

There is a second question, and it is darker. If the rib was the right bone, will it still be needed? Every tradition defined woman first through what only she could do: carry a child, nourish it, sustain a household. Technology is now attacking each of these functions in turn. The final part of this book takes seriously the idea that woman could become, in some sense, unnecessary, and asks what would prevent it.

The book is written for readers who believe, readers who do not, and readers who are not sure. It does not ask anyone to give up their faith or their science. It asks only that each be allowed to speak in its own voice, and that we listen for the places where they rhyme.

PART I

The Bone

Reading the rib in scripture and myth

CHAPTER 1

Not from His Head, Nor from His Feet

A surgeon who removes part of a rib to rebuild a jaw or a nose sees something that never happens with a femur or a skull. If the thin membrane around the bone is left in place, the gap fills. Months later, a scan shows new bone where there was none. Of all the bones in the adult human body, the rib is one of the very few that can regenerate across a large defect. Keep this fact in mind. We will return to it often, because the ancient authors who chose the rib as the origin of woman knew nothing of it, and yet chose well.

This first chapter reads the Hebrew text closely. It is the text that most readers in the world know, directly or through translation, and it is the one most often quoted to argue that woman is secondary. A careful reading shows that it says something more interesting.

Two creations, not one

The Bible opens with two accounts of the creation of humanity, placed side by side. The first, in Genesis 1, is majestic and symmetrical. God speaks, and things come into being in an ordered week. On the sixth day: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them" (Genesis 1:27).

In this account there is no sequence between the sexes. The word translated "man" is *adam*, which here means humanity, and the verse immediately specifies that humanity exists as male and female. Both bear the image of God. Both receive the same blessing and the same command to fill the earth and govern it. If Genesis ended at chapter one, there would be no debate about woman's origin at all.

The second account, which begins at Genesis 2:4, is earthier and more intimate. God forms *ha-adam*, "the earthling", from the dust of *ha-adamah*, "the ground", a pun that works in Hebrew as "human" and "humus" works in English. God breathes into his nostrils, plants a garden, sets him in it and gives him a single prohibition. Only then comes the sentence quoted in our prologue: "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him" (Genesis 2:18).

Biblical scholars have long noted that the two accounts differ in vocabulary, in style and in the name they use for God. Many attribute them to different sources later woven together. Jewish and Christian readers who hold the text as a unity read them as two angles on one event: the first gives the cosmic meaning, the second the human drama. For our purposes the important point is the same in both readings. The tradition chose to begin with equality and then to tell the story of difference. It did not erase the first chapter when it wrote the second.

The search among the animals

Between the problem and its solution, the text inserts a curious scene. God brings every animal to the man to see what he will call it. The man names them all, and still: "for Adam there was not found an help meet for him" (Genesis 2:20).

The scene is often skipped, but it is the hinge of the story. The man is surrounded by living beings, and he is still alone. Company is not the problem; correspondence is. What he lacks is not a servant, a pet or a worker, all of which the animals could provide, but a being who is like him and yet not him. The difference that is about to be created is not a difference of kind. It is a difference within the same kind.

Ezer kenegdo: the helper who faces him

The phrase translated "help meet" in the King James Version is *ezer kenegdo*. The English has given us the word "helpmeet", with its faint suggestion of an assistant. The Hebrew points elsewhere.

Ezer appears about twenty times in the Hebrew Bible. In most of them, the *ezer* is God. "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help" (Psalm 121:1); "our help is in the name of the Lord" (Psalm 124:8); "the God of my father was mine help" (Exodus 18:4). An *ezer* is not someone of lower rank. It is someone who supplies what the other cannot supply for himself, often in a situation of danger.

Kenegdo is a compound that means "corresponding to him", "opposite him", "in front of him". It describes a face-to-face position. Medieval Jewish commentators played on its ambiguity: Rashi, citing an older tradition, noted that it can also mean "against him", and drew the moral that a partner helps when the relation is right and opposes when it is not. Either way, the image is of two beings standing level, eye to eye.

The phrase as a whole therefore describes a rescuer who stands opposite. If this is subordination, it is a strange kind.

Tsela: the side, not only the rib

Then comes the operation. "And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; and the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man" (Genesis 2:21 to 22).

The Hebrew word is *tsela*. Elsewhere in the Bible it almost never means a rib. It means a side: the side of the Ark of the Covenant (Exodus 25:12), the side chambers of the Temple (1 Kings 6:5), the side of a hill (2 Samuel 16:13). Its use for an anatomical rib is, in fact, unusual.

This observation launched one of the oldest interpretive traditions about the passage. The rabbis of the Talmudic era, in the commentary known as Genesis Rabbah (8:1), proposed that the first human was created with two faces, male and female, joined back to back, and that God "sawed him in two", giving each half its own back. In this reading Eve is not taken from a small piece of Adam. She is one entire side of a being that was originally double. A similar idea appears in Plato's *Symposium*, where Aristophanes describes the first humans as round, double creatures split in two by Zeus, each half forever searching for the other.

A modern biblical scholar, Ziony Zevit, has gone further and suggested that *tsela* may refer to a different bone altogether, one present in most male mammals but absent in humans. The suggestion is controversial and we mention it only to show how open the word remains. The image the tradition settled on, the rib, is one interpretation among several. It happens, as we shall see, to be a remarkably fertile one.

Bone of my bones

The man's first recorded words are a poem, the first poetry in the Bible: "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man" (Genesis 2:23). In Hebrew the pun is *ishah* from *ish*. The emphasis falls entirely on sameness of substance. He does not say "here is my helper" or "here is my subject". He says, in effect, "at last, one of my own kind".

And the narrator draws a conclusion that reverses the usual direction of patriarchal societies: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). It is the man who leaves. The movement is toward reunion, toward undoing the separation of the operation.

The commentator's formula

In the eighteenth century the English commentator Matthew Henry gave the passage its most famous summary, one that has been repeated at weddings ever since. The woman, he wrote, was "not made out of his head to rule over him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be beloved."

Henry did not invent the idea. Similar sayings circulated in the Talmud and among medieval preachers. But his formula captures something that a purely legal reading misses. The choice of body part is a statement about relation. Head, feet and side imply three different social orders: domination, servitude, partnership. The text chose the side.

Notice also the last phrase: "near his heart". The ribs are the bones that enclose and protect the heart and lungs. Henry was thinking of

affection. Part V of this book will show that he was, unknowingly, also describing cardiology.

Table 1.1. Three readings of the creation of woman in Genesis 2

Reading	Key words	What woman is	Social model implied
Hierarchical	"help meet", "taken out of man", created second	A derived, secondary being	Husband rules, wife assists
Egalitarian	*ezer kenegdo*, "bone of my bones", "one flesh"	An equal who faces man	Partnership
Unitive (Genesis Rabbah, Plato)	*tsela* as "side", double first human	The other half of an original whole	Reunion of what was divided

Source: GSF reading of the Hebrew text and classical commentaries.

What the hierarchical reading needed

Why, then, did the hierarchical reading dominate for so long? Partly because of later texts. In the New Testament, the first letter to Timothy argues that women should not teach men "for Adam was first formed, then Eve" (1 Timothy 2:13). Order of creation became an argument for order of authority. Partly because of Greek philosophy, which entered Christian theology through thinkers who had inherited Aristotle's view that the female is an incomplete male. And partly, no doubt, because societies that were already organised hierarchically found in the text what they brought to it.

But the hierarchical reading has to do something the text does not do. It has to treat "second" as "lesser". In the logic of Genesis 1, the order is ascending: light, then sky, then land, then plants, then animals, then humanity, each stage more complex than the last, and the final creature the crown. Read with that logic, the woman created last is the culmination, not the afterthought. The rabbis noticed this too, and some drew exactly that conclusion.

WHAT THE CURVE TEACHES

- Genesis gives two accounts. The first creates male and female together, both in the image of God.
- The word translated "help meet" is used mainly of God, and describes a rescuer who stands face to face.
- *Tsela* usually means "side". An ancient tradition reads the creation of woman as the division of a double being.
- The choice of the side, rather than the head or the feet, is itself a statement about relation.

CHAPTER 2

The Curve in the Hadith

The Qur'an tells the story of Adam and his spouse several times, in different chapters and with different emphases. What it never mentions is a rib. This simple fact surprises many Muslims as much as it surprises non-Muslims, because the image of Eve drawn from Adam's side is so common in popular retellings. To understand where the rib enters Islamic tradition, and what it means there, we have to separate three layers: the Qur'an, the prophetic sayings known as hadith, and the commentaries.

A single soul

The Qur'anic account of human origins is compressed into a formula that recurs three times: "O humankind, be mindful of your Lord who created you from a single soul, and created from it its mate, and spread from the two of them many men and women" (4:1). The same idea appears at 7:189, "It is He who created you from a single soul, and made from it its mate, that he might find rest in her", and at 39:6.

The key word is *nafs*, "soul" or "self". The phrase *nafs wahida*, "a single soul", is grammatically feminine in Arabic, although it refers to the first human. Classical commentators generally identified it with Adam and

read "from it" as "from him". But the text itself does not name a body part, does not specify a sequence of operations, and does not distinguish the substance of the spouse from the substance of the first soul. What it insists on is common origin. All of humanity, men and women, descends from one source.

The purpose of the pairing is also stated. Not obedience, not service, but rest. The verb in 7:189 comes from the root *s-k-n*, which gives *sakan*, tranquillity, dwelling, home. The same root returns in the most quoted Qur'anic verse on marriage: "And among His signs is that He created for you, from yourselves, mates, that you may find rest in them, and He placed between you affection and mercy" (30:21). Affection, *mawadda*, and mercy, *rahma*, are presented as signs of God, on a par with the creation of the heavens and the earth mentioned in the next verse.

Eve is never named

Another surprise: the name Eve, *Hawwa* in Arabic, does not occur in the Qur'an. Adam's spouse is always "your mate" or "his mate". She enters the tradition by name only through the hadith and later literature.

More important is what the Qur'an does with the story of the forbidden tree. In Genesis the serpent speaks to the woman, the woman eats and gives to the man, and the woman's punishment includes pain in childbirth and subjection to her husband. In the Qur'an, Satan whispers to both of them (7:20). Both eat (7:22). Both realise their nakedness. Both pray together: "Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves" (7:23). And in one telling, the blame is placed specifically on Adam: "Adam disobeyed his Lord and went astray. Then his Lord chose him, turned to him and guided him" (20:121 to 122).

There is no Eve who tempts, no original guilt passed through the woman, and no curse of subordination. The pair are forgiven together. Whatever later societies made of women in Muslim lands, they could not build it on a Qur'anic story of female culpability, because there is none.

The hadith of the rib

The rib enters through the hadith. The best known version, transmitted by the collections of al-Bukhari and Muslim, attributes to the Prophet Muhammad words that can be rendered as follows:

"Treat women well, for woman was created from a rib, and the most curved part of the rib is its upper part. If you try to straighten it, you will break it; and if you leave it, it will remain curved. So treat women well." (al-Bukhari, *Sahih*, hadith 3331; Muslim, *Sahih*, hadith 1468)

A shorter version reads: "Woman is like a rib. If you try to straighten it, you will break it. And if you enjoy her company, you enjoy her company while she has a curve in her." (al-Bukhari 5184)

Read quickly, these sayings can sound like a complaint about female character. Read with attention to their structure, they are something else. The saying is framed on both sides by the same instruction: treat women well. The middle is not a description to be corrected but an argument for patience. The curve is presented as part of the nature of the bone. The man who tries to force it into his own idea of straightness does not improve it. He destroys it.

Classical commentators, including Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani in his monumental commentary on al-Bukhari, *Fath al-Bari*, read the hadith as a call to gentleness and tolerance in marriage. Modern Muslim scholars have gone further, arguing that the comparison is metaphorical and that

"created from a rib" describes a disposition rather than a literal surgical origin, especially since the Qur'an itself speaks only of a single soul.

The theology of the curve

For the purposes of this book, the hadith contributes something the Hebrew text does not: the idea of curvature as an essential and valuable property. Genesis speaks of a side. The hadith speaks of a curve.

Engineers would recognise the intuition at once. A curved beam behaves differently from a straight one. Under a load, an arch converts bending into compression and spreads the force along its length. Bridges, domes and the human foot all use this principle. The rib cage itself is a set of curved beams that flex with every breath, deform under a blow and return to shape. A straight bar of the same material would be stiffer, but also more brittle. Force it, and it snaps.

The hadith's warning, "if you try to straighten it, you will break it", is therefore not only moral advice. It describes a real mechanical fact. The value of the curve lies precisely in its refusal to be straight. In Part IV we will see that this is also a fair description of a psychological pattern: women report more distress than men, but break less often under it.

Table 2.1. Woman's origin in the Hebrew Bible, the Qur'an and the hadith

Feature	Genesis 1 to 3	Qur'an	Hadith
Material of creation	*Tsela*, side or rib	A single soul (*nafs wahida*)	A rib, curved
Sequence	Man first (Gen. 2); together (Gen. 1)	From the single soul, its mate	Not discussed
Purpose	A helper who faces him; end of solitude	Rest, affection and mercy	Not discussed
Who is tempted	The woman first	Both together	Not discussed
Who is blamed	The woman, then the man	Both; Adam named in 20:121	Not discussed
Key instruction	Leave father and mother; one flesh	Live with them in kindness (4:19)	Treat women well; do not force the curve

Source: GSF compilation. Qur'an references by chapter and verse; hadith numbering follows the standard editions of al-Bukhari and Muslim.

Why the distinction matters

Separating the layers is not a scholarly game. It changes what a believer may legitimately claim. A Muslim who argues that women are inferior "because Eve was made from Adam's rib" is citing neither the Qur'an, which mentions no rib, nor the hadith, which uses the rib to demand kindness. A Christian or Jew who argues that woman is secondary "because she was made second" must explain away Genesis 1, *ezer*, and "bone of my bones".

None of this settles the many legal and social questions that the traditions have debated for centuries, such as authority in marriage or inheritance. Those debates have their own texts and their own scholars, and this book does not try to resolve them. Our point is narrower. On the specific question of origin, the oldest texts of all three Abrahamic traditions are far more favourable to woman than the uses later made of them.

WHAT THE CURVE TEACHES

- The Qur'an speaks of humanity created from "a single soul". It mentions no rib and never names Eve.
- In the Qur'an both partners are tempted, both eat, both repent, and both are forgiven.
- The hadith of the rib is framed by the command "treat women well". Its central image is curvature.
- A curved beam is not a defective straight beam. Its curve is what lets it bear loads without breaking.

CHAPTER 3

Lady of the Rib, Lady Who Makes Live

Long before Genesis was written, scribes in southern Mesopotamia pressed into clay a poem about a garden. The land was called Dilmun. It was pure and bright, a place where "the lion did not kill, the wolf did not snatch the lamb". Its god was Enki, lord of fresh water and wisdom. Its great goddess was Ninhursag, the mother of the land. Assyriologists call the poem *Enki and Ninhursag*. It was first translated in the early twentieth century, and its interpretation was popularised by the great Sumerologist Samuel Noah Kramer.

A garden, a forbidden plant and a wounded god

The story is strange and much of it does not concern us. What matters is its ending. Ninhursag causes eight plants to grow. Enki, curious, has them brought to him and eats them one by one, without permission. Ninhursag, furious, curses him: "Until he is dead, I shall not look upon him with the eye of life." Enki falls ill. Eight parts of his body begin to fail.

The other gods are alarmed. A fox persuades Ninhursag to return. She seats Enki beside her and asks him, part by part: "My brother, what

hurts you?" For each ailing organ she gives birth to a healing goddess. One of the organs is the rib. The goddess born to heal it is called Nin-ti.

The oldest pun in literature

In Sumerian, *nin* means "lady". *Ti* means "rib". But *ti* also means "to live" or "to make live". Nin-ti is therefore, at the same time, "Lady of the Rib" and "Lady who makes live". The double meaning was surely deliberate: Sumerian scribes loved such plays on signs.

Kramer noticed the parallel at once. In Genesis, the woman is made from a rib, and her name, Eve, *Hawwah* in Hebrew, is explained in the text as "the mother of all living" (Genesis 3:20). The Hebrew words for "rib" and "life" have nothing in common, so the pun cannot work in Hebrew. Kramer's suggestion was that the Hebrew story preserves, without its original wordplay, an association between rib and life that went back to Sumer. As he put it, one of the most ancient literary puns was carried over into the biblical paradise story, although there it lost its point.

Not every scholar accepts the borrowing. The garden of Dilmun and the garden of Eden differ in many ways, and the gap between the two texts is well over a thousand years. But the coincidence is remarkable enough to hold our attention. The earliest known association of a woman with a rib is also an association of a woman with healing and with life.

The rib that heals

Consider what Nin-ti does in the poem. She is not created to serve Enki, to keep him company or to bear his children. She is created to repair him. The rib is wounded, and the lady of the rib makes it live again.

This brings us back to the surgeon at the start of Chapter 1. The rib is indeed the bone that repairs itself. In a study published online in 2014 in the *Journal of Bone and Mineral Research*, researchers at the University of Southern California led by Francesca Mariani reported following a human patient whose rib had been partly removed by a surgeon. Over six months the missing bone and cartilage partially regrew. In mice, the team showed that when the surrounding sheath of tissue was left in place, sections of rib cartilage regenerated completely within one to two months. A later study by the same group, published in *eLife* in 2019, identified a population of stem-like cells in the rib's outer membrane that orchestrates this large-scale repair. Craniofacial surgeons had reported the phenomenon for decades: they take rib grafts precisely because the donor site grows back.

The Sumerian poets knew nothing of periosteal stem cells. But their image, a goddess of the rib who makes alive, is closer to the biology of the bone than any reading that makes the rib a symbol of weakness.

Other first women

It is worth placing Eve and Nin-ti beside the other famous first woman of the ancient world. In the Greek poet Hesiod, writing in the seventh century BCE, Pandora is fashioned by the gods as a punishment for men after Prometheus steals fire. She is beautiful and deceptive, "a sheer, hopeless snare", and she releases every evil into the world from her jar. Hesiod makes her the ancestor of "the deadly race and tribe of women".

The contrast is instructive. In Hesiod, the first woman is a separate creation, different in substance, sent from outside as a curse. In Genesis, the first woman is made from the same flesh and bone as the man, to end his solitude. In the Qur'an, she comes from the same single soul, for rest, affection and mercy. In Sumer, the lady of the rib is a healer. Of

these four traditions, only the Greek one makes woman an alien and a punishment. It is a historical irony that Greek philosophy, through Aristotle's view of the female as a defective male, did more than any scripture to shape later Christian and Islamic theology of woman.

Table 3.1. The first woman in four ancient traditions

Tradition	First woman	Made from	Purpose	Character
Sumerian (*Enki and Ninhursag*)	Nin-ti	Born to heal Enki's rib	Healing, life	Restorer
Hebrew (Genesis 2)	Eve, *Hawwah*	Man's side (*tsela*)	End of solitude; *ezer kenegdo*	"Mother of all living"
Qur'anic	Adam's mate (unnamed)	The single soul	Rest, affection, mercy	Partner in fault and forgiveness
Greek (Hesiod)	Pandora	Earth and water, by the gods	Punishment for men	Deceptive, source of evils

Source: GSF compilation from Kramer, *History Begins at Sumer*; the King James Version; the Qur'an; Hesiod, *Works and Days* and *Theogony*.

Life as the name of woman

The name Eve deserves one more moment. In Genesis 3:20, after the expulsion has been announced, after death has entered the world, the man names his wife *Hawwah* "because she was the mother of all living". It is a defiant name. At the very moment when mortality is pronounced, the man names the woman after life.

Arabic tradition preserves the same association. Commentators explained the name *Hawwa* as coming from *hayy*, "living", because she was created from a living being. Whatever the true etymology, the three traditions agree in tying the first woman to life itself.

This is the thread that connects the ancient texts to the modern data in Parts II to V. Female biology is, in a very literal sense, organised around the making and preserving of life: the carrying of pregnancy, the transfer of antibodies to the child, an immune system tuned to vigilance,

a cardiovascular system protected through the reproductive years. It is not surprising that the bearer of life should also be, on average, the better survivor. What is surprising is how early, and how consistently, the oldest stories said so.

WHAT THE CURVE TEACHES

- The oldest known link between woman and rib is the Sumerian goddess Nin-ti, "Lady of the Rib" and "Lady who makes live".
- In that story the woman of the rib is a healer, created to restore a wounded god.
- The rib is in fact the human bone best able to regenerate over large distances.
- Of four ancient first women, only the Greek Pandora is a separate creation and a punishment.

CHAPTER 4

What the Commentators Made of the Rib

A text is never read alone. Between Genesis and the modern reader stand three thousand years of commentators, preachers, philosophers and poets, each of whom found something different in the rib. Some found humiliation. Some found dignity. A few found a whole theology of partnership. This chapter follows that long conversation, because the meaning that most people attach to the rib today was made as much by its readers as by its authors.

The midrash of the modest part

The rabbis of late antiquity loved to ask why. Why a rib, of all the parts of the body? One answer, preserved in Genesis Rabbah (18:2), is not flattering. God deliberated, the midrash says, from which part to create woman. Not from the head, lest she be proud; not from the eye, lest she be flirtatious; not from the ear, lest she eavesdrop; not from the mouth, lest she gossip; not from the heart, lest she be jealous; not from the hand, lest she be light-fingered; not from the foot, lest she wander. Rather from a hidden, modest part. And yet, the midrash concludes ruefully, despite all this care, she acquired every one of those faults.

The passage is a joke at women's expense, and it tells us more about the anxieties of its authors than about the text. But even here, notice the logic. The choice of the rib is presented as a deliberate act of design meant to produce virtue. The same body of literature contains, as we saw in Chapter 1, the tradition of the double first human sawn in two, in which woman is an entire half of the original being. Jewish interpretation never settled on a single reading. It preserved several, side by side, and let them argue.

Aristotle's long shadow

The most damaging reading of woman in the Western tradition did not come from scripture at all. It came from biology, or what passed for biology in the fourth century before our era. In his treatise *On the Generation of Animals,* Aristotle described the female as, in effect, a defective male: a being in whom the vital heat of generation had been insufficient to produce the complete form. The male seed provided the form of the child; the female provided only the matter.

This idea passed into Christian, Jewish and Islamic thought through the great medieval synthesis of Greek philosophy and scripture. Its influence was enormous, precisely because it claimed to be science. A preacher could cite Genesis for woman's secondary creation and Aristotle for her imperfect nature, and the two seemed to confirm each other.

The irony, from the perspective of this book, is complete. Modern biology has reversed Aristotle on almost every point. The female is not a male in whom development failed; the male is the variant produced when a single gene on the Y chromosome switches development onto a different track. The female carries the backup copy, the stronger immune response and the longer life. Developmental biologists now

know that female development also depends on active genetic programmes, so neither sex is simply a default. But the idea of the female as a failed male has no basis at all. Aristotle's biology was the most influential argument against woman for two thousand years, and it was wrong.

Neither mistress nor servant

The medieval Christian theologians who absorbed Aristotle were nevertheless capable of reading Genesis with care. In the twelfth century, the Parisian theologian Peter Lombard wrote in his *Sentences*, the standard theology textbook of the Middle Ages, that woman was formed not from the head of man nor from his feet but from his side, because she was to be neither his mistress nor his servant, but his companion: *nec domina, nec ancilla, sed socia*. Hugh of Saint Victor said much the same.

A century later, Thomas Aquinas repeated the idea in the *Summa Theologiae*. He accepted Aristotle's view that, considered as an individual, the female is in some sense "misbegotten". But when he asked why woman was made from a rib, he answered in the language of partnership. It was right, he wrote, for woman to be made from a rib of man, "first, to signify the social union of man and woman, for the woman should neither use authority over man, and so she was not made from his head; nor was it right for her to be subject to man's contempt as his slave, and so she was not made from his feet."

Here, five centuries before Matthew Henry, is the formula of head, feet and side. It was a commonplace of medieval theology, repeated in sermons and commentaries across Europe. The same theologians who held, with Aristotle, that woman was physically inferior held, with

Genesis, that she was meant to be man's companion. The two ideas lived uneasily together for centuries.

The devil's gateway

Other Christian writers took a darker path, focused not on the rib but on the fruit. The North African theologian Tertullian, around the year 200, addressed women in a notorious passage: "You are the devil's gateway; you are the unsealer of that forbidden tree; you are the first deserter of the divine law." Augustine, two centuries later, developed the doctrine of original sin, transmitted from Adam through every human generation, and although he placed primary responsibility on Adam, later readers often made Eve its source.

These readings had real consequences. They supported the exclusion of women from teaching and priesthood, the suspicion of female sexuality and, in their most extreme forms, the witch trials of early modern Europe, in which women were the great majority of the victims. It is worth remembering, as Chapter 2 showed, that the Qur'an tells the story of the garden without any of this: both partners eat, both repent, both are forgiven.

A woman answers

In 1405, in Paris, a widow who earned her living as a writer completed a book that answered the misogynists of her age point by point. Christine de Pizan's *Book of the City of Ladies* imagines three crowned figures, Reason, Rectitude and Justice, who help the author build an allegorical city for women of virtue.

When the author complains that learned men describe woman as a lesser creature, Reason replies with a reading of Genesis. Woman, she says, was made from the side of man to signify that she should stand

beside him as a companion and never lie at his feet as a slave. And she adds an argument of her own: Adam was made from mud, outside paradise, while woman was made inside paradise, from the noblest material available, the body of man. If the material of creation determines worth, woman was made of finer stuff.

Christine was not a modern feminist. She accepted many of the social arrangements of her time. But she showed, more than five centuries before modern scholarship, that the text itself could be turned against its misogynist readers. The rib was not a weapon only one side could use.

The commentators of Islam

In Islamic tradition, the rib entered Qur'anic commentary early. The great commentator al-Tabari, writing in Baghdad in the early tenth century, collected reports from the companions of the Prophet and their students explaining that the spouse in 4:1 was Hawwa, created from Adam's shortest left rib while he slept. Many of these reports show the influence of Jewish and Christian traditions circulating in the early Muslim community, material that later scholars called *isra'iliyyat*, narratives of Israelite origin, and treated with caution.

In the early twentieth century, the reformist commentary known as *Tafsir al-Manar*, begun by the Egyptian scholar Muhammad Abduh and continued by his student Rashid Rida, stressed that the Qur'anic verse itself names neither Adam nor a rib. Rida read the "single soul" as the common essence of humankind, a reading open to several interpretations, and the reformist school treated the detail of the rib as material that had entered commentary from biblical sources rather than from the Qur'an. Later Muslim thinkers went further. The Pakistani-American theologian Riffat Hassan argued that the hadiths of the rib, read literally, sit uneasily with the Qur'an's egalitarian account of

creation, and that they must be read through the Qur'an rather than the reverse. The American scholar Amina Wadud, in *Qur'an and Woman* (1992), built a whole reading of gender in the Qur'an on the principle of the single soul, *nafs wahida*, from which both sexes come.

Modern biblical scholarship

In Christianity and Judaism, the twentieth century brought a similar return to the text. In 1895, the American suffragist Elizabeth Cady Stanton published *The Woman's Bible*, a commentary that contrasted the egalitarian creation of Genesis 1 with the secondary creation of Genesis 2 and urged readers to prefer the first. In 1978, the biblical scholar Phyllis Trible published *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, which argued that in Genesis 2 the first creature, *ha-adam*, is not a male at all but a sexually undifferentiated "earth creature". Only with the creation of woman do male and female, *ish* and *ishah*, appear together. In this reading, man and woman are created simultaneously, at the moment of division.

Trible's reading remains debated, but it has shaped a generation of scholarship. It also brings us back, by a different road, to the Genesis Rabbah tradition of the double being and to Plato's divided humans. Across two and a half thousand years, careful readers kept arriving at the same idea: that the story of the rib is a story of one becoming two, not of one creating a lesser other.

Table 4.1. Selected readings of the creation of woman, from antiquity to the present

Period	Reader	Reading of the rib	Implication
4th century BCE	Aristotle (not a reader of Genesis)	The female as an incomplete male	Inferiority, presented as biology
c. 200	Tertullian	Woman as "the devil's gateway" (focus on the fruit)	Suspicion and exclusion
c. 5th century	Genesis Rabbah	A double being divided; also, a "modest" part chosen by design	Unity, alongside ambivalence
10th century	al-Tabari	Hawwa from Adam's shortest left rib	Literal, partly biblical sources
12th century	Peter Lombard	"Neither mistress nor servant, but companion"	Partnership
13th century	Thomas Aquinas	Not from the head or the feet, but from the side	Social union
1405	Christine de Pizan	Made in paradise, of finer material than Adam	Dignity
Early 20th century	*Tafsir al-Manar* (Abduh and Rida)	The Qur'an names no rib; the detail came from biblical sources	Return to the text
1978	Phyllis Trible	*Ha-adam* as undifferentiated earth creature	Simultaneous creation
1992	Amina Wadud	One soul, *nafs wahida*, as the basis of equality	Equality of origin

Source: GSF compilation.

What the history teaches

Three lessons emerge from this long conversation.

The first is that the hierarchical reading of the rib was never the only one, even in the most patriarchal centuries. Medieval theology, which is often caricatured as uniformly misogynist, repeated for centuries the formula that woman was made to be man's companion.

The second is that the most damaging ideas about woman came not from the rib but from elsewhere: from Greek biology, which declared her defective, and from a reading of the fruit that made her the gateway of sin. Both have been undermined, the first by modern science and the second, for Muslims, by the Qur'an itself.

The third is that every generation of careful readers, including women who had to fight to be heard, found in the text resources for dignity. The rib, it turns out, has always been a contested bone. This book stands in the line of those who read it as a sign of partnership, and asks what modern science adds to their reading.

WHAT THE CURVE TEACHES

- Aristotle's view of the female as a defective male shaped two thousand years of theology, and modern biology has reversed it.
- Medieval theologians, including Peter Lombard and Thomas Aquinas, taught that woman was made from the side to be man's companion, "neither mistress nor servant".
- Christine de Pizan argued in 1405 that woman was made in paradise, of finer material than Adam.
- Modern scholars, Muslim and Christian, have returned to the text: the Qur'an's single soul and Genesis's undivided earth creature.

CHAPTER 5

The Curved Rib Thesis

We now have the image: a bone taken from the side, curved, associated from the very beginning with life and healing. This chapter turns the image into a working hypothesis, and sets out the rules we will follow in testing it.

Anatomy of a rib

The human rib cage contains twenty-four ribs in twelve pairs. Seven pairs attach directly to the breastbone through cartilage, three attach indirectly, and two "float", attached only at the spine. Each rib is a thin, flattened, curved bone, twisted slightly along its length. Its outer shell is dense; its interior is spongy and filled with marrow that produces blood cells throughout life. The whole cage is wrapped in muscle and moves with every breath, expanding like the handle of a bucket being lifted.

Five properties of this bone stand out.

It comes in pairs. No rib is alone. Each has a mirror twin on the other side, and the cage as a whole is redundant: the loss or fracture of one rib rarely compromises breathing, because its neighbours share the load.

It regenerates. As we saw in Chapter 3, the rib can rebuild large missing sections if its outer membrane survives. Few adult bones can do this.

It is curved. The curve is what allows the cage to flex under pressure and return to shape. It turns blows into distributed forces and makes the chest elastic.

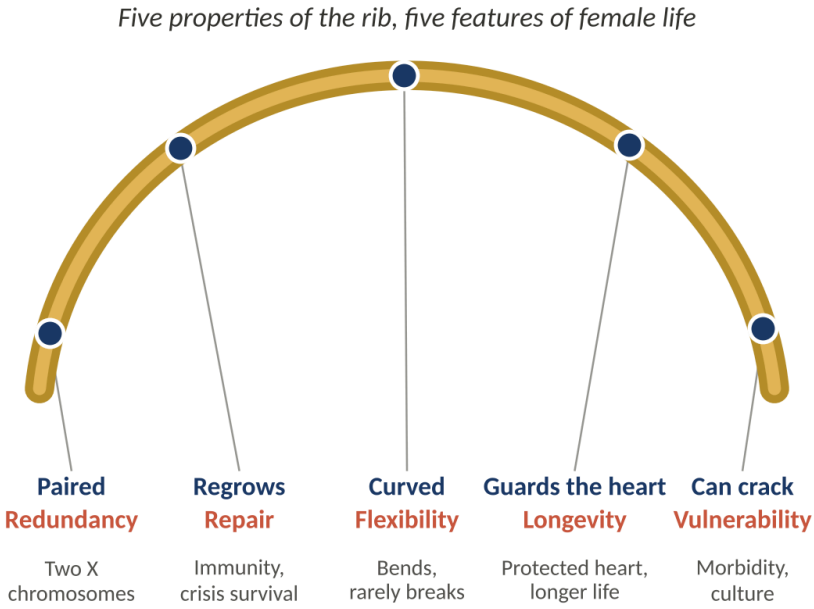
It guards the heart. The ribs enclose and protect the heart and lungs. They are the body's shield for its most vital organs.

It can crack. Ribs are among the most commonly fractured bones, especially in older people whose bones have thinned. The curve that gives flexibility also creates stress points, and the elasticity of youth is lost with age.

From anatomy to hypothesis

The Curved Rib Thesis is that each of these five properties corresponds to a well-documented feature of female life, and that together they explain more about the difference between the sexes than any single factor.

Figure 5.1. The Curved Rib Thesis



Source: GSF.

Pairing becomes redundancy. Women carry two X chromosomes; men carry one X and a Y. The second X acts as a backup copy for hundreds of genes. Part II shows how this redundancy protects women from genetic disease, makes their cells a mosaic, and contributes to longer life across the animal kingdom.

Regeneration becomes repair. Women's immune systems respond more strongly to infection and vaccination, their cells age more slowly on some measures, and they survive extreme crises such as famines and epidemics better than men. Part III examines this capacity for repair.

Curvature becomes flexibility. Women report more anxiety and depression than men, yet they die by suicide far less often, take fewer lethal risks and seek help more readily. Part IV interprets this as a psychology of bending without breaking.

Guarding the heart becomes longevity. Women's hearts are protected by their hormones for decades, they die less often of the chronic diseases of middle age, and they outlive men in every country in the world. Part V maps this advantage and measures how much of it is biology and how much is behaviour.

Cracking becomes vulnerability. Women's strengths have costs: more autoimmune disease, more years lived in poor health, more fragile bones in old age, and a long history of medical neglect. Culture can also break the curve, as in societies that prefer sons. Part VI looks at these cracks.

Table 5.1. The Curved Rib Thesis: five properties and the evidence examined

Property of the rib	Feature of female life	Main evidence	Part
Comes in pairs	Two X chromosomes; genetic backup	X-linked disease, cellular mosaicism, lifespan across species	II
Regenerates	Stronger immune response and repair	Immunology, telomeres, survival in famines, epidemics, COVID-19	III
Is curved	Distress without breaking	Depression and suicide data, risk-taking, stress response	IV
Guards the heart	Cardiovascular protection, longevity	Life expectancy in 215 countries, chronic disease, cloister study	V
Can crack	Morbidity, autoimmunity, cultural override	Health surveys, sex ratios at birth, missing women	VI

Source: GSF.

Rules of the game

A hypothesis built on an image runs obvious risks. It can become a machine for confirming itself, gathering every fact that fits and ignoring the rest. To avoid this, we hold ourselves to five rules.

First, the image organises; it does not prove. No fact about the rib proves anything about women, and no fact about women proves anything about the intentions of the authors of Genesis or the hadith.

When we say that the rib "corresponds" to a feature of female biology, we mean that the image helps us see a pattern, not that the pattern was encoded in the text.

Second, averages are not destinies. Every difference reported in this book is a difference between group averages, with enormous overlap between individuals. A statement such as "women are more likely to be diagnosed with depression" says nothing about any particular woman or man.

Third, we report the evidence against. Where the data cut against the thesis, we say so and give them full weight. Chapter 8 shows that more female than male embryos are lost in early pregnancy. Chapter 12 shows that the female advantage almost disappears in an earthquake. Part VI is devoted entirely to weaknesses.

Fourth, difference is not hierarchy. Showing that women survive better than men in famines does not make women superior, any more than showing that men are, on average, stronger makes men superior. The point of the thesis is that the sexes are built for partnership, each covering the other's weak points. That, after all, is what *ezer kenegdo* means.

Fifth, we separate biology from behaviour wherever possible. Much of the female advantage in survival comes from what men do: smoking, drinking, fighting, driving fast, avoiding doctors. Chapter 21 uses a natural experiment and our own statistical model to estimate how much of the gap would remain if men behaved like women. The answer is not zero. It is also much less than the gap we see.

The question beneath the question

There is one more reason to take the image seriously. Behind every debate about the difference between the sexes lies a question about purpose. Why are there two sexes at all? Why is the difference arranged the way it is? Religious traditions answer in terms of meaning: the difference exists for relation, for rest, for the end of solitude. Evolutionary biology answers in terms of function: the difference exists because it helped our ancestors leave descendants.

These answers are usually presented as rivals. The curved rib suggests that they may be describing the same reality from two directions. A being built to carry and protect new life will tend to be built for redundancy, repair, flexibility and the protection of the heart. A tradition that sees woman as "the mother of all living" will tend to describe her through images of life, healing and closeness to the heart. The convergence does not prove either account. But it should make us curious.

WHAT THE CURVE TEACHES

- The rib has five properties: it is paired, it regenerates, it is curved, it guards the heart, and it can crack.
- The Curved Rib Thesis maps these onto redundancy, repair, flexibility, longevity and vulnerability.
- The image is a lens, not a proof. Averages are not destinies, and difference is not hierarchy.
- The rest of the book tests each property against data, including the evidence that cuts against it.

END OF THE FREE EXCERPT

The full book continues with six more parts: the second copy, the bone that grows back, bending without breaking, guarding the heart, where the curve cracks, and whether technology will still need the rib.

29 chapters, 220 pages, 22 figures and 14 tables, with original data analysis for 215 countries.

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WHAT IF THE RIB WAS THE RIGHT BONE?

A bone that comes in pairs, grows back, bends without breaking and guards the heart.

For three thousand years, the story of woman made from a rib was read as proof that she was secondary. This book reads it again, alongside the Qur'an, the hadith and the oldest myth of Sumer, and then tests it against chromosomes, famines, pandemics and the life tables of 215 countries.

The result is a new way of seeing the difference between the sexes, and a warning: for the first time, technology could make woman less necessary.

- Across 229 animal species, the sex with two matching sex chromosomes lives 17.6 percent longer.
- In 2020, men lost more life expectancy than women in 137 of 165 countries where it fell.
- Men die by suicide more often than women in every one of 184 countries with data.
- With women's habits, men would close most of the five-year gap. One to two years is biology.
- Artificial wombs, eggs made from skin and synthetic partners: four worlds of 2075.



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