Matrimonial Adventures

The Pie and The Past

BY

Joseph C. Lincoln

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JOSEPH C. LINCOLN, AMERICAN HUMORIST

It was some years ago that I first saw Joseph C. Lincoln. I did not meet him then, because at that time I was "small fry" on one of the leading magazines and had the pleasure only of catching glimpses of the big authors who came to see the fiction editor. Mr. Lincoln wasn't quite so big then as he is now, but the direction in which he was headed was more than evident.

Joseph C. Lincoln was born on Cape Cod and started his career at an early age as an artist, but shortly discovered that his talents lay in the direction of writing. Among his first writings are his famous "Cape Cod Ballads." They not only were a success when they appeared, but the book has gained in popularity enormously throughout the years. He has sold stories, short and long, to all the prominent magazines in the country, and he has reached a very special place in the hearts of his admirers. He has the faculty not only of entertaining his readers, of putting the laugh in the kind place, but for subtle understanding of human nature and of people. It is this quality that makes him just plain "Joe Lincoln" to hundreds of thousands of his enthusiastic American friends.

MARY STEWART CUTTING, JR.

Mrs. Lurella Ellis took the cranberry pie from the oven and set it on the back of the stove. It was a successful pie, if that salt as shouldn't; crisp, flaky brown crust; crimson, juicy filling; a very good pie indeed. But, good as it was, it was not too good for Obed. Nothing was too good for a husband like Obed Ellis.

They had been married a month. She had come from Cape Ann to Cape Cod to act as housekeeper and companion for old Mrs. Bailey at Trumet. On the first of September she had taken a day's holiday and, in common with at least one-half of Trumet's population, excursioned to the country fair at Ostable. There, mostly in all the great crowd, she had stopped before the booth where one might, for the small sum of five cents, toss three rings at a rack of pegs. These pegs were numbered. If you were fortunate enough—or skillful enough—to ring a peg, one received a prize. The prizes were more or less valuable—principally less. A red-faced person with pink and white shirt sleeves made strenuous announcement.

"Here y' are, ladies and gents!" he bawled. "Here y' are! Toss 'em in and ring 'em out. A genuwine guaranteed prize for each and every ringer. Look at 'em, ladies and gents, look at 'em! Australian solid nickel-silver scarf pins! Genuwine New Jersey ivory napkin holders! Alaska diamond-studded hair combs for the ladies! Three chances for a nickel, half a dime, five cents! Toss 'em in and ring 'em out!"

Lurella noticed that while many tossed them in, but few succeeded in ringing them out. Then a inexperienced dropped a nickel and prepared to try his luck. He was, she thought, a striking looking man, thick set, broad-shouldered, sunburned, wearing a blue uniform with brass buttons and a blue yachting cap. Like her, and therefore unlike the majority of the people on the fair grounds, he seemed to be quite alone. She had been on the point of moving on; now she stayed to watch him make the trial.

Two rings he tossed and each shot, although close, was a miss. The third, however, fairly encircled a peg. The red-faced person lifted both pink and white shirtsleeves in the air.

"Look at that!" he bellowed. "Look at it! The gent rings number thirty-two, winnin' the genuwine Alaska studded di'mond lady's hair comb. He lays down five cents and he takes away a hundred dollars—more or less. There you are, sir! There's the genuwine Alaska. Shall I hand it to you or will your wife put it on now and give the congregation a treat?"

Lurella was standing beside the winner of the prize. The red-faced person was dramatically offering her the comb. She blushed furiously. The bookers-on, divining the mistake, cheered and laughed. She hurried away. A moment later she felt a touch on her elbow. The broad-shouldered man in the blue uniform had followed her. His embarrassment seemed to be as great as hers.

"Ma'am," he stammered; "I—I wish you'd take it. I—I'd like you to have it first rate. I'm all alone and—and it ain't a bit of use to me, honest."

She drew herself up. Lurella was nothing if not proper. She had never flirted in all the thirty-five years of her life. Having read a great deal, she knew exactly what and how to reply.

"Sir!" she exclaimed.

"Yes'm," said the man, removing the yachting cup. "I wish you would take it. That—that feller was a fool and if you say so I'll punch his nose. Shall I?"

She was momentarily startled out of her propriety.

"Oh, no!" she exclaimed.

"I will if you say so. He's a smart alick and he'd ought to be licked. But—but, honest, I do wish you'd take this thing. I'would look nice on you and—and I hain't got nobody of my own to give it to. I'm a stranger here. Won't you take it, please? I—I don't mean it fresh nor nothin'."

Lurella looked at him. He was about her age, or a little older. He had an honest face, if she ever saw one. He was blushing and did not at all resemble the bold, bad lady-killers of whom she had read in her favorite romances.

She hesitated. Then . . . well, then her own romance began.

Before she returned to Trumet that evening she had learned much concerning the man in the blue uniform. His name was Obed Ellis. He was a bachelor, had been to sea in his younger days, had since worked hard at various employments on shore, and was now acting as watchman and caretaker in charge of the property of the big hotel at Orham. During the summer he was in command of the hotel pier and boats, but now, as the season was over, had more leisure. His wages, he informed her with satisfaction, "went on just the same, summer or winter." He was a Methodist, a Republican, and his life was insured for two thousand dollars. He was alone in the world, just as she was.

Together they inspected the poultry and live stock exhibits. He treated her to salt-water taffy, ice cream soda and a "shore dinner" in the refreshment tent. They saw the trotting races and the balloon ascension. Before bidding her good-by at the railroad station, he informed her that he owned an automobile, and, if she "hadn't no objection," he would kind of like to drive over one of these days and take her to ride.

The following Saturday afternoon he did drive over. The ride was delightful; the little car rattled and "skipped" but kept going. A week later he came again, and twice during the week following. A month later he proposed marriage. It was then that she told him of her other love affair. When she was eighteen she had been engaged to a man who kept a billiard saloon at Pigeon Cove. Later she broke the engagement.

"I found out," she said with a shudder, "that he was dissipated. He never told me, but once I saw him drunk—intoxicated, I mean. He had been drinkin' whisky then, but when he couldn't get that he drank Jamaica ginger. He'd been arrested and in the lock-up two or three times. If he'd told me I might have forgiven him; I was a girl and I probably should have forgiven him and been sorry afterwards. But he'd never told me and I couldn't forgive that. That's why I'm telling you this now, Obed. The time to tell such things is before marriage, not afterwards. There mustn't be secrets between husband and wife. I've read too many stories in books about folks with a past gettin' married, and nothin' but misery ever came of it. If you've got anything in your past life now is the time to tell me of it, Obed."

"Sure thing!" agreed Obed, promptly. "What do you say, Lurelia? Will you have my pie?"

She said yes, and, six weeks later they were married and she came to Orham to live with him in the little cottage at the rear of the hotel property. Now, a very happy wife, she was making him a cranberry pie because he liked it better than any other kind.

The pie baked, and the table in the dining room set for dinner, she stepped to the kitchen door to see if he was in sight. He was not but someone else was, a disreputable male, who was sauntering toward her across the back yard. His clothes, his hat, his unshaven face, classified him in her judgment as a tramp. She was not afraid of tramps and asked him what he wanted.

"Ma'am," he said, "does anybody name of Ellis live here?"

"Mr. Obed Ellis lives here," she replied; "but he's out. I'm Mrs. Ellis."

The tramp nodded. "They told me this was his hang-out," he observed. "I thought I'd just stop in and see him. So you're his wife, eh? I didn't know he was married."

"Come in and sit down," she said. He came into the spotless kitchen and sat down upon one of her freshly scrubbed chairs. He looked about the room, crossed his dingy, ragged-trousered legs, and sniffed.

"Say," he observed, cheerfully, "that pie over there smells good to me."

She did not take the hint. "I can give you some cold meat and bread and butter," she said, coldly. "Will that do?"

He grinned. "And a slab of that pie, eh?" he queried.

"I should say not!" That pie is for my husband. If the meat and bread and a cup of tea won't satisfy you, then—"

"Oh, they'll satisfy me all right, if there's enough of 'em. Just watch what I do to 'em. Trot 'em out."

She filled a plate and put it and the cup of tea on the kitchen table. "So you used to know Mr. Ellis?" she observed. "What is your name?"

He grinned again, as well as one can grin with a mouth full.

"My name is Dugan," he said; "Mike Dugan, but they don't generally call me that. Got any more tea?"

She refilled the cup. "Where did you and my husband know each other?" she asked.

"Oh, over in the pen—the jail, I mean."

The teapot did not fall from her hand, but it came very near it.

"The jail!" she exclaimed. "Why—why, what jail?"

"The Ostable jail, of course. There ain't no other in these diggin's. Obe and me were in there at the same time."

"When was this?" she asked.

"Eh? Oh, I dunno. Four years ago, maybe. How about comin' acrost with the butter?"

She put the butter plate beside him.

"You and—and my husband were in—in the jail together four years ago?" she asked.

"Sure, Mike!"

"What—why was he there?"

"Eh? Oh, same thing that gets 'em all. Needed the coin, I guess. Didn't he never tell you?"

She wanted to cry, but instead she tried to laugh.

"Was—was you in there for—for stealin'?"

"Me? Not on your life! Rum was my ruin, same as it's been a whole lot of others. Eh? Haw, haw!"

"How long was—was Mr. Ellis there?"

"I dunno. Year or so, maybe. I ain't seen him since. He got his discharge a week afore they let me loose."

A familiar step sounded on the walk by the side door. Lurella started.

"You—you stay right here," she commanded. "Don't you go away. And don't you speak or—or move. My husband is comin'. We—we'll surprise him."

She hurried into the dining room, closing the kitchen door behind her. The familiar step came nearer. The side door, that from the walk to the dining room, opened. Obed came in.

"Ship ahoy, old lady!" he hailed, lovingly. "Dinner ready? Ain't late, I hope, am I? Why, what's the matter?"

She faced him, white and trembling, but firm.

"Obed," she said, "sit down. Dinner'll be ready in a minute. Sit down. I want to—to speak to you about something."

He sat down, regarding her wonderingly.

"To speak to me?" he repeated. "For the land sakes, what's happened? Is the cow dead?"

"No . . . Oh, don't laugh! . . . I don't feel funny just now. Obed, do you remember that time when you asked me to marry you?"

"Eh? . . . Well, say! Do you think I'd be liable to forget it? Luckiest day in my life that was. Why—"

"Hush! Obed, I asked you then if—if you had a past."

"A which?"

"A past. Some secret in your life you hadn't told me. You said no. Now I ask you again. Have you?"

He stared at her. "Have you?" she repeated.

"What—? Say—! No, of course, I ain't."

"Obed—oh, don't lie to me! I couldn't ever forgive your lyin' to me."

"Lie—to you? Who said I'd ever lied to you? I'll break the swab's everlastin' neck!"

"Hush! Sit right down again in that chair. Obed, was you ever in the Ostable jail?"

He hesitated. Then he colored.

"Why—why, yes," he admitted. "But I didn't think—"

"Oh, hush! Be still! You were there and—and you never told me!"

"Why—well, no, I didn't. You see, I was kind of ashamed, and—I didn't amount to nothin' much, anyhow."

"Didn't amount to anything? Oh, my soul, how can you talk so? Did you know a man there named—what was it—Dugan?"

"Dugan? Yes, certain. Tough lookin' critter, regular tramp. In there for bein' drunk and smashin' windows and raisin' hob generally. Yes, I knew him. He was the only one I had to look after for one spell. We got to be kind of—well, chummy, as you might say. 'Twas lonesome bein' janitor and keeper and everything else in a place like that one-horse Ostable jail, and a feller has to talk to somebody. The sheriff, he only come around once in a while, so—"

"Wait! Oh, wait! You were—a keeper—in the jail?"

"Sure! I suppose likely I had ought to have told you about it, Lurelia; but, you see, I was kind of ashamed same as I said. 'Twasn't much of a job, but I took it 'cause mother was sick—'twas just afore she died—and the boat shop where I'd been working had shut down and I needed money. Then, another thing made me ashamed of it was on account of bein' tired. Politics, 'twas. Jim Leghorn, he was sheriff, and he give me my walkin' papers to make room for another Democrat, same as him. Only job I ever was discharged from, that jail job was. I'm sorry I never told you, Lurelia, but . . . Eh? How did you come to know about it and—and that Dugan tramp?"

She did not answer. Instead, she hurried out into the kitchen, closing the door. The kitchen was empty, so were the plates and the teacup on the table. So was the chair where her recent visitor had been sitting. So, too, was the rack on the back of the stove where the cranberry pie had been put to keep it warm.

A moment later she entered the dining room. She leaned over her husband and put her arms about his neck.

"Obed," she said, laughing and sobbing together, "I—I'm awfully sorry but you won't have any cranberry pie this noon. I—"

Obed interrupted. "Cranberry pie?" he repeated. "Who's talkin' about cranberry pie? I want to know why you—"

"Yes, yes, dear. Of course, you do. And I'm goin' to tell you. But first I want to tell you how bad I feel about that pie. I'll make two for supper and you can eat them both, all of 'em if you want to."

Degrees of Ignorance

Dorothy had been reading fairy tales. At bedtime mother went downstairs to take care of the furnace for the night. On account of being affected by her reading the fairy tales, she followed her mother to the basement. This was unusual. Her mother reminded her about it, whereupon Dorothy said she was afraid to stay alone. Her mother told her of her cowardice, stating that her only six-weeks-old brother Donald was not even afraid to stay alone upstairs. Whereupon she answered her mother. "Uh, he doesn't know enough to be afraid."

Today's Sermonette.

No man can live happily who regards himself alone—he turns everything to his own advantage. Go forth into the busy world and love it; interest yourself in its life; mingle kindly in its joys and sorrows; try what you can do for men rather than for what you can make them do for you, and you will know what it is to have men more yours than if you were their king and master.—Boston Transcript.

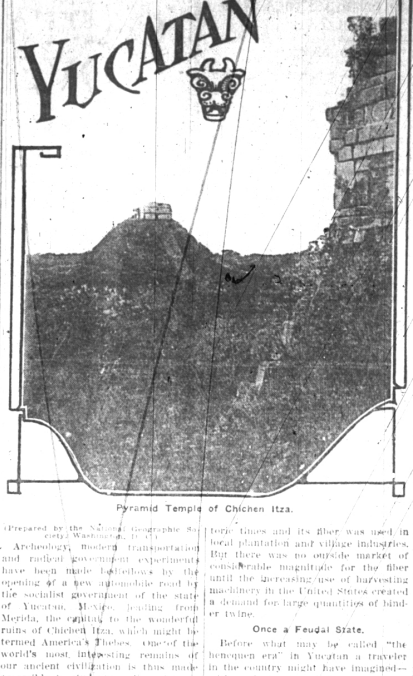
Woman's Weapons.

A bachelor says that when a woman goes gunning for a husband she arms herself with—curling irons and a box of smokeless powder.—Exchange.

Thought for the Day.

Always be too busy to pity yourself, but never too busy to sympathize with others.

YUCATAN



Pyramid Temple of Chichen Itza.

(Prepared by the National Geographic Society, Washington, D. C.)

Archeology, modern transportation and radical government experiments have been made bedfellows by the opening of a new automobile road by the socialist government of the state of Yucatan, Mexico, leading from Merida, the capital, to the wonderful ruins of Chichen Itza, which might be termed America's Thebes. One of the world's most interesting remains of our ancient civilization is thus made accessible to students and tourists as a by-product to a radical government's plan to make work for laborers during an economic depression by pushing road construction.

In the hot, rather dry Yucatan peninsula, which today is little visited by outsiders, civilization reached its highest point on the North American continent in the years before the coming of Columbus. After the finding of savages by Columbus and his immediate followers both on the West Indian islands and on parts of the mainland, the discovery a little later in Yucatan of structures built of stone, and built well, and of artistic carvings, came as a great surprise to the Spaniards.

While some of the structures were in use at the time of the Spanish conquest, a number of once great cities had been abandoned and swallowed up by the jungle. Some mysterious fate had overtaken this people, the Mayas, and only a somewhat degenerate remnant was clinging to the works of their more illustrious ancestors. The wholly new regime resulted in the final extinguishment of their culture.

Temples and palaces, prisons, "convents," arenas for games, astronomical observatories and monuments, all accurately built of masonry and decorated with artistic carvings and hieroglyphics, are some of the sign posts pointing to the achievements of the Mayas and their development of culture. Archeologists state that at the time of their mysterious decline they were at the threshold of a true civilization. Indeed, in some ways they had surpassed in intellectual achievements the civilization of the Egyptians and the Babylonians.

Their Writing and Architecture.

In their system of writing, the Mayas had reached a most interesting point, found among no other existing people in the world, the transition point between picture writing, which the Chinese have never passed beyond, and phonetic writing by means of an alphabet such as that we use.

The architectural types of the Mayas and their decorative designs have features so similar to some of those of the old world that the earlier students of the American ruined cities believed that their builders had been influenced by Egyptians, Babylonians or Hindus. The types of arches and certain sculptural designs were compared especially to those found in the great Hindu temple of Boro-Budur in Java. It is the more general opinion now, however, that the works of the Mayas were the result of a culture born on this continent and acquired by this people in their toilsome way upward from savagery and through barbarism.

The story of Yucatan in recent times is the story of henequen fiber. Offhand, that doesn't seem to affect the average American to any great extent. But it does affect him every time he buys a loaf of bread. The story might be framed like that of the house that Jack built. Henequin means reasonably cheap and plentiful binder twine; binder twine makes possible the use of harvesting machines; harvesters cheapen grain production; cheap grain means cheap bread; and so henequin, and arid Yucatan, play important parts in feeding America and the world.

The other side of the story—the rapid development of the henequen industry and the pouring of wealth into Yucatan—chiefly from the grain belt of North America—undoubtedly played its part in swinging the political pendulum from extreme feudalism to socialism.

Henequen, which is a sort of cactus not unlike the century plant or the "pulque" cactus in appearance, had been grown in Yucatan since prehistoric times and its fiber was used in local plantation and village industries. But there was no outside market of considerable magnitude for the fiber until the increasing use of harvesting machinery in the United States created a market for large quantities of binder twine.

Once a Feudal State.

Before what may be called "the henequen era" in Yucatan a traveler in the country might have imagined—with a few concessions to race and climate—that he was in the heart of Europe's old feudalism. Some of the principal land owners had truly baronial estates through which one could travel for days. On the most extensive estates were scattered half a dozen or more great stone castle-like haciendas in the care of major domos. In these sumptuous dwellings members of the owner's family might not spend a night a year, for they lived for the most part in state in the capital, Merida, or spent their time traveling in Europe or the United States. In those days cattle raising was the chief industry in Yucatan and prosperity never reached below the few members of the propertied class.

Climate and physical conditions gave Yucatan its feudalism. The surface of the country consists of only the thinnest of soil, and underneath is porous limestone. The climate is dry and hot half the year, but there is a recognizable amount of rainfall during the other six months. Yucatan is one of the few areas in which there is an appreciable rainfall, but no streams or even stream beds. As fast as the fain falls during the rainy season it seeps through the thin soil and soaks into the limestone. The lack of surface water, and the fact that hardly any food crops can be grown on much of Yucatan's poor soil, made it practically impossible for the peons to exist except under the wings of the great landholders.

The latter constructed capacious reservoirs at their haciendas, in which enough water was stored during the rainy season to supply all their retainers through the six months' dry period. The situation was helped out, too, by the cenotes, the unique water holes of Yucatan, apparently formed by a falling in of the roofs of subterranean lakes. In most cases these queer natural reservoirs were owned by the landed proprietors.

Laborers Now in Control.

Toward the close of the Nineteenth century henequen production shouldered out cattle production from the place of first importance, and before many years the fiber dominated the life of the country. The old feudal system remained largely unchanged, however, and the landowners became extremely wealthy. But some of the prosperity inevitably filtered down to a growing middle class, and even to the plantation laborers, and soon Yucatan gave indications of a political turbulence unknown in the older feudal days.

When the World war came groupers reached its peak in Yucatan, with henequen fiber selling for as much as 19 cents a pound. The few landowners were no longer able to dominate the state government and the laborers and their friends, who gained control, reshaped the entire scheme of things. Wages of workers were fixed by legislation at $5.22 a day (in United States money) for each eight hours. After the armistice the piece of henequen fell sharply, and by 1921 it had fallen to 4 cents, and in 1922 it reached its lowest point, 3½ cents. The wage laws remained unchanged and many of the plantations, carefully tended for years, were abandoned to wild growth. The country then experienced what was probably its greatest economic crisis. Henequen production was greatly reduced and conditions have improved somewhat with the fiber now at 4½ cents a pound.

Yucatan is the thumb, which, with the finger of Florida, almost encloses the Gulf of Mexico. It is for the most part a flat plain, its highest hills being measured in only hundreds of feet. It is one of the first lands to which the world-faring gulf stream gives its warmth.

Sisters of Crusoe's Isle

The Chilean islands of San Ambrosio and San Felix are mere pinpoints of rock in the Pacific ocean and never have been inhabited by man. About the only life which the islands support is that of a few stunted, desert shrubs and a few seals and sea birds, says a bulletin of the National Geographic society. The islands were discovered in 1574 by the same Juan Fernandez who discovered and gave his name to the equally isolated land that later became "Robinson Crusoe's island," 500 miles to the south. The islands were Spanish territory by virtue of this discovery and passed to Chile when that country attached its independence. San Ambrosio, which is two miles long by a half-mile wide, is entirely waterless.—Detroit News.

The Dangerous Age.

Judge—"Have you ever committed perjury?" Fair Witness—"Not since the last census was taken."

Graduate Nurse Finds "The Perfect Remedy"

"From my long experience as a professional nurse, I do not hesitate to say Tanlac is nature's most perfect remedy," is the far-reaching statement given out for publication, recently, by Mrs. L. A. Borden, 425 Pontius Ave., Seattle, Wash., a graduate of the National Temperance Hospital, Chicago.

"I have used Tanlac exclusively for seven years in the treatment of my charity patients," said Mrs. Borden, "and my experience has been that for keeping the stomach, liver, kidneys and bowels functioning properly, and for toning up the system in general, it has no equal."

"About a year ago I had a lady patient who could not keep a thing on her stomach, not even water. I prevailed on her to try Tanlac and after the sixth bottle she could eat absolutely anything she wanted without the slightest bad after-effects.

"I had another patient who simply could not eat. I put him started on Tanlac and by the time he finished three bottles he was eating ravenously and able to work.

"These two instances are typical of the wonderful merits of the medicine. My confidence in Tanlac is unlimited."

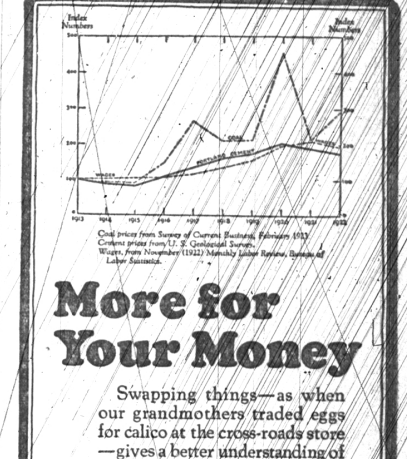
Tanlac is for sale by all good druggists.

There should always be at least enough work to make the loafing enjoyable.

Occasionally, a loud laugher surprises you by being as mean as the dickens.

In Wrong.

The worst thing about being a pedestrian in a town where the majority of inhabitants are motor car owners is that you get no sympathy when you start cussing the chronic current fiends and the horn honkers.



Coal prices from Survey of Current Business, February 1923. Cement prices from U. S. Geological Survey. Wages, from November (1922) Monthly Labor Review, Bureau of Labor Statistics.

More for Your Money

Swapping things—as when our grandmothers traded eggs for calico at the cross-roads store—gives a better understanding of values. By measuring one thing against another we too can often judge values more clearly.

Coal and wages make up more than half the manufacturing cost of cement.

The chart above shows price fluctuations for portland cement, coal and wages during the past ten years. In each case 100 is used to represent 1913 figures, by the Government departments which compiled these statistics.

Translated into "eggs and calico" language, this chart shows that a ton of coal would buy nearly twice as much cement in 1922 as in 1913. A day's wages also would buy more cement in 1922 than in 1913.

This means that even though coal and wages make up more than half its manufacturing cost, cement is now relatively lower in price than either coal or wages.

So, considering these increased costs, it is plain that in buying cement you get more for your money than before.

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Value of a Smile.

A smile is preliminary to the cultivation of good manners. It is nearly half of them.

In the Philippine islands there are 25,000 lepers.

A total of nearly $40,000,000 is contributed annually to Protestant foreign missions.

There is a curious political-sociological theory that if everybody can't be rich, nobody shall.

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