

Wajah Terakhir

Maria mengambil sebatang. Meletakkan bungkus rokok di atas rok span abu-abu. Menyalakannya.

Trotoar yang berpayung langit sebening jendela rumah sakit itu ramai. Beberapa orang berdiri dekat tanaman pembatas. Sebagian lain duduk dekat lampu jalanan. Di tangan mereka batangan rokok juga menyala. Seorang perempuan berkaos singlet dengan tangan memegang rantai anjing berlari melintas lantas hilang di tikungan jalan.

Seorang laki-laki berkulit sewarna batang pohon mendekat, "Have a lighter?"

"Eh. Ada." Maria tersentak dan refleks menyerahkan pemantik yang diambilnya dari saku kemeja.

"Terima kasih. Dari Indonesia kan? Maaf, saya susah bedain sama orang Filipin. Ehm, kita tadi ketemu di ruangannya Dokter Foo."

"Ya."

"Dari Jakarta?"

Maria menggeleng. Terakhir kali, dua belas tahun lalu, kakinya memang hilir mudik di kota itu, tapi ia lahir dan besar di Singkawang. Jadi, Maria merasa tidak berbohong.

"Oya, saya dari Sunter. Jakarta."

"Oh...." Maria menarik ujung rok span. Membenarkan posisi duduknya. Maria tahu Sunter. Setiap hari, ketika berangkat kerja, ia melewati jalan-jalan kecil di sekitar tempat itu untuk menghindari macet.

"Papa saya masih kemo. Apa keburu ya kalau ke Lucky Plaza? Katanya dari sini tinggal naik bis. Enggak sampai lima menit."

Maria mengangguk.

“Oya, tadi saya ngobrol dengan... aduh saya lupa namanya.”

“Mei Lang.”

“Ya. Ya. Mei Lang. Saya enggak sangka dia dari Tebet. Mukanya... hmm, Singapura banget.”

“Cina?”

“Hmm, iya. Iya. Tadinya saya mau minta tolong dia jadi penerjemah papa.”

“Oh....”

“Papa enggak ngerti omongan dokter Foo, omongan susternya juga. Bahasa Inggris papa payah. Kalau ada yang nerjemahin, papa bisa ke sini sendiri. Soalnya saya enggak selalu bisa antar papa.

Takut tiba-tiba ada keperluan yang bentrok. Eh, taunya Mei Lang udah banyak janji di Mount Elizabeth. Hmmm kalau.... Eh, bener kan Lucky Plaza enggak jauh?”

Maria mengangguk lagi. Diambilnya botol air mineral. Tangan itu mengusap bintik-bintik embun di tubuh botol. Jemari basah Maria membuka tutupnya. Mengisap sedotan pelah-pelan. Sepertinya laki-laki itu tahu kalau Maria tidak berniat menyambung pembicaraan. Dia menjauh. Sudut mata Maria menguntit langkahnya sampai berdiri dekat asbak tidak jauh dari ujung jalan. *Banyak orang yang tinggal di Sunter. Mungkin hanya mirip....*

Maria tengadah.

Sinar matahari yang tidak seterik biasa nyelinap antara daun-daun trembesi. Dahannya berayun ringan. Selebar daun jatuh ke pangkuan. Persis di atas bungkus rokok. Maria menjentikkan jari. Daun itu jatuh. Diterbangkan angin, terseret-seret di muka kasar trotoar, menyentuh ujung sepatu laki-laki yang sedang menyalakan rokok kedua dengan sisa rokok pertama. Tumitnya menginjak daun itu. Robek. Serupa sayatan halus di telapak tangan Maria. *Tidak. Tidak mungkin salah. Kulit mereka sama persis. Hidungnya. Matanya.... Dia mirip sekali dengan laki-laki tadi. Mirip sekali ayahnya.*

Peristiwa kembali. Mulai berlintasan lagi. Maria meremas roknya yang melembab. Bulu-bulu halus di rok itu menusuk bagai duri. Terasa nyeri. Ia memejamkan mata berharap lintasan-lintasan peristiwa itu pergi. Seperti kelopak matanya yang tertutup rapat tidak dapat ditembus sinar matahari. *Tidak mungkin salah....*

Luka kering di sudut mata Maria seperti diserbu gigitan ratusan semut hitam. Berdenyut perih. Migrain mendadak menjambak bagian belakang kepala. Maria menggumamkan Bapa Kami. Titik-titik keringat tumbuh di dahi. Membesar. Titik itu merambati hidung. Melintasi luka. Jatuh.

Maria mengusap keringatnya. Ia celingukan. Berdiri limbung di antara deretan gantungan pakaian. Dari balik dinding kaca toko dilihatnya percik api meletik dari kabel listrik. Asap membumbung menembus langit sehitam jelaga.

“Ayo, Mar. Cepat! Lari.” Ratih menepuk pundak Maria.

Maria geragapan. Kakinya masih dipaku di lantai. Susah beranjak. Ratih cepat menyeret Maria. Tapi Maria menahan tarikan tangan Ratih, “Tas...”

“Gila. Tinggalin, Mar.”

“Tiket.”

“Mar! Kamu gila? Itu!”

Ratih membalik paksa tubuh Maria menghadap pintu depan.

Pintu kaca depan yang berpaling itu hampir terbuka. Palang besi sedikit lagi jebol dari engselnya. Orang-orang berdesakan mendorongnya. Mata Maria bersitatap dengan banyak mata di muka pintu. Mata-mata yang merah dan besar. Mulut-mulut itu tertutup dan terbuka. Kelihatannya mereka berteriak tapi Maria tidak bisa mendengar suara yang keluar dari mulut mereka.

“Ayo!”

“A... apa?”

“Pake nanya! Enggak dengar?”

“Apa?”

“Gila ni anak! Lari, Maria. Lari.”

“Tapi...”

“Lu Cina tau.”

Suara dari lidah kaku Ratih menembus telinga Maria. Keras. Serak. Padangan mereka beradu. Mungkin karena asap yang mulai memenuhi ruangan, mungkin juga karena air mata mengaburkan pandangannya, Ratih melihat kabut di mata Maria.

“Ayo...”

Tangan Ratih yang basah keringat membetot pergelangan Maria. Ratih menuju tangga darurat. Mereka menerobos kerumunan teman-teman mereka yang juga berlari saling

bersilangan. Beberapa kali mereka tersandung. Jeritan dan teriakan saling timpa. Saling tabrak. Kepala Maria serasa mau meledak.

“Sebentar. Paspor...” Sontak Maria teringat buku kecil hijau itu. “Enggak mungkin ditinggal, Tih. Minggu depan aku ke Singapura. Biar hanya dua minggu, biar hanya jaga toko, tapi di Orchard Road. Ke luar negeri enggak pakai uang. Dapet bonus dua kali gaji. Enggak mungkin ninggalin tas di loker kan? Ada paspor. Tiket. Uang yang belum dikirim ke papa. Kunci kamar. Foto mama di depan kuil Surga Neraka...”

“Mar!” Ratih memotong cercau Maria.

“Tapi...”

“Liat!”

Maria menoleh.

Batu dan kayu di tangan orang-orang di muka pintu itu menghantami pintu dan kaca sampingnya. Kaca sebelah kanan mulai retak. Sebatang besi menghajar. Sebongkah batu terbang menerjang. Pyar. Pecahan kaca menghambur memenuhi lantai.

Pintu terbuka.

“Bakar!”

Orang-orang merangsek masuk. Orang-orang dari dalam. Orang-orang di dalam. Semua bercampur seperti tawon yang sarangnya terbakar. Linggis menyabet etalase. Roboh. Besi menghantam rak. Patah. Parang mencacah manekuin. Batu menumbuk muka. Darah.

Tangan Ratih terlepas dari pergelangan Maria.

Garis-garis bekas sayatan di pergelangan tangan Maria mengeras. Jemarinya bergetar. Rokok yang tinggal satu isapan lagi terjatuh.

“Eit, di sini kan enggak boleh buang sampah sembarangan.” Laki-laki itu sudah berdiri, mendekat. Memungut batang rokok dari trotoar. “Saya enggak jadi ke Lucky Plaza. Tanggung. Takutnya papa nyari, terus marah. Maklum, papa juga punya darah tinggi. Eh, diliat-liat di sini banyak juga ya orang Indonesia. Kayaknya pada betah tinggal di sini. Mungkin karna lebih bersih. Lebih teratur. Digaji pake dolar. Papa aja ngotot berobat di sini...”

Laki-laki itu duduk tak jauh samping Maria. Maria merapatkan paha. Menggosok-gosokkan bekas sayatan di telapak tangan ke rok spannya. Bungkus rokok jatuh. Maria mengambil

dan meletakkannya di antara mereka. Mungkin sebagai dinding. Bibir laki-laki itu masih bergerak, terus bicara. Telinga Maria tidak mendengar apa-apa.

Telinga Maria mendadak pekak, tidak bisa mendengar apa pun. Ia terus menuruni tangga darurat. Hak sepatunya berulang nyangkut di palang besi tangga. Maria terus berlari. Dadanya berdegup. Sepatunya lepas. Telapak tangannya tersayat pinggiran tangga. Maria terus berlari.

Mereka dekat.

Maria hampir di undakan terakhir. Tiga lagi. Ia melompat. Kelingking kaki kiri terselip di retakan semen.

"Itu ..."

"Allahu Akbar..."

"Bakar!"

Teriakan-teriakan terdengar persis di liang telinga. Tidak hanya datang dari orang-orang yang mengejarnya. Ada juga suara dari depannya.

"Hoi. Itu satu lagi."

"Kalem. Bentar lagi juga dapet."

"Giliran gua kan? Mulus...."

Maria lari berbalik arah. Nafas berkejaran dengan langkahnya yang pincang. Mereka makin dekat. Maria berhenti. Tidak ada lagi jalan. Tembok menghadang. Maria naik. Lututnya tergesek dinding tembok yang mengelupas. Sayatan di telapak tangan berdarah.

Ia jatuh.

Delapan laki-laki mengepung. Merangsek. Merapat. Tubuh mereka berbau asap. Tangan mereka memegang pecahan botol. Mencengkram batang rotan. Menggenggam gagang sabit.

Maria mundur.

Ada sepasang tangan yang tidak membawa apa-apa. Maria menatap wajah laki-laki itu. Lama. Mengiba. Tapi tangan itu menarik kaki Maria. Ia terjengkang. Kepala Maria membentur tembok. Membentur pinggiran tempat sampah.

"Garap!"

Maria mulai hilang sadar. Tapi suara laki-laki itu masih terdengar tegas. Wajah itu masih tergambar jelas.

Dada Maria berdegup cepat. Ia mengambil sebatang rokok. Membakarnya. Mengisapnya. Menghembuskan asap hingga takada lagi udara bersisa.

“Saya ngomong terus ya? Eh, kita udah ngobrol dari tadi tapi belum kenalan. Saya Agus. Eh, kalau Mbak kayak Mei lang, maksudnya penerjemah juga, saya mau minta tolong. Papa butuh penerjemah, jadi... ehm, apa bisa bantu? Saya bukan enggak mau nemenin papa tapi saya juga ada keluarga. Anak saya satu-satunya baru masuk SMP. Saya suka enggak tenang ninggalin dia lama-lama. Apalagi dia anak perempuan. Jakarta sekarang rawan, enggak aman. Gimana kalau dia diculik, diperkosa? Aduh.... Saya enggak bisa bayangin. Eh, bukan enggak bisa, enggak mau saya bayangin. Perkosaan itu rajanya kejahatan. Harus dikutuk! Kalau ditusuk pisau, mungkin satu-dua minggu sembuh. Tapi coba Mbak bayangin korban perkosaan.... Mereka mungkin takut punya keluarga. Ada yang enggak bisa punya anak. Bahkan ada yang gila segala. Traumanya seumur hidup. Ngeri kan?”

Kepala Maria bergerak takberaturan. Mungkin berarti anggukan atau sekedar gerak takberarti.

“Jadi, bukannya saya enggak sayang atau berbakti sama orang tua. Tapi saya juga khawatir dengan keluarga saya. Papa sih setuju-setuju aja ke sini sendiri asal ada yang bantu. Papa pengertian sekali kalau soal keluarga. Bagi papa, keluarga nomer satu. Oya, biar dari militer papa orangnya enak. Baik. Enggak rewel.... Eh, kok, mbak pucat? Waktu tadi ketemu papa juga gitu. Sakit?”

Mata Maria tidak bisa terbuka penuh. Kakinya sukar digerakkan. Ia meringkuk di bawah langit yang seperti puing kayu terbakar. Retak-retak. Kelam. Di ujung matanya darah mengering. Tampak celana panjang seragamnya koyak. Beha yang talinya putus tergeletak. Kancing kemeja menempel di pundaknya. Tubuhnya likat. Berbau asap dan sperma. Pahanya membeku. Selangkangannya mati rasa. Seperti ada ribuan paku berkarat tertusuk di situ.

Maria menggeser botol air mineral. Bintik-bintik embun mencair. Tangannya mengusap-usap lingkaran bundar bekas pantat botol. Lingkaran itu menipis. Mengering. *Apa aku bisa? Memberi pipi kiri setelah pipi kanan ditampar....*

Tangan kanan Maria menekan angka-angka di telepon mobil.

“Mei Lang, are you still in Dr. Foo’s room.... Ya, this is Maria.... Let me be an interpreter for the patient from Jakarta.... Alamak.... It’s Ok.... Really. I’m Ok.... Hmm, solid.... Ok.... Thanks a lot.”

“Jadi, Mbak, mau bantu? Terima kasih ya. Saya enggak masalah kasih tambahan uang saku. Enggak banyak sih, tapi lumayan.... Aduh, terima kasih banyak ya. Nanti kita sama-sama ke atas ketemu papa.”

Maria mengambil botol air mineral. Jemari lembabnya membuka tutup botol. Mengisap sedotan pelan-pelan. *Kanker stadium empat tidak akan lama. Apa salah kalau aku membantu, mempercepat?[]*

The Last Face

Maria took out a cigarette and lit it, placing the packet on her grey spandex skirt.

Beneath a crystal clear sky, the footpath outside the hospital was crowded. Several people were standing near the flowerbeds bordering the path, while others were seated near the streetlights, cigarettes in their hands. A woman in a singlet top with a dog on a chain ran past then disappeared round the corner.

A man whose skin reminded Maria of the colour of a tree trunk approached her. "Got a lighter?"

"Sure. Here." Maria jerked up and automatically handed over her lighter that she took out of her shirt pocket.

"Thanks. You're from Indonesia, right? Sorry, I have trouble telling Indonesians and Filipinos apart. We met just now in Dr Foo's rooms."

"Yes."

You from Jakarta?"

Maria shook her head. The last time she'd been there was twelve years ago. She knew it well, but she'd been born and brought up in Singkawang. So she felt she wasn't really lying.

"I'm from Sunter, in Jakarta."

"Oh..." Maria tugged at the hem of her skirt and adjusted the way she was sitting. She knew Sunter. Every day when she set off for work she'd drive through the back streets around there to avoid the traffic jams.

"My father's having chemo. Is Lucky Plaza far from here? They said it's just a bus ride away. Less than five minutes."

Maria nodded.

“O, yes. I was talking just now with... damn, I forget her name.

“Mei Lang.”

“Yes, that’s her, Mei Lang. I didn’t think she was from Jakarta. She looks.... Mmm... more like a Singaporean.”

“Chinese?”

“Mmm, yes. I wanted to ask whether she’d help us and become Papa’s interpreter.”

“Oh...”

“Papa doesn’t understand the way Dr Foo talks or the nursing sisters either. English is hard for him. If there was someone to translate for him then he could come here by himself. The thing is I can’t always bring him. There’s always the risk of some clash of appointments. You know Mei Lang has got lots of interpreting jobs at Mount Elizabeth. Mmm.... So Lucky Plaza really isn’t all that far?”

Maria nodded again. She took out a bottle of mineral water and wiped off the drops of condensation on it. With wet fingers she took off the cap and slowly sucked on a straw. It seemed the man knew she had no intention of continuing the conversation. He moved away. Maria followed him out of the corner of her eye until he was standing near the ash can not far from the end of the street. *Lots of people live in Sunter. It might be nothing more than a resemblance.*

Maria looked up.

The sun’s rays, not as hot as usual, filtered through the leaves of the rain tree. Its branches were swaying gently. A leaf fell onto her lap, right on top of the cigarette packet. She flicked it off. It was picked up by the wind and dragged along the rough surface of the footpath, touching the tip of the man’s shoe as he lit a second cigarette with the butt of the first. He trod on the leaf with the heel of his shoe, shredding it. Like the fine striations on the palms of Maria’s hands. *No, I can’t possibly be mistaken. Their skin is exactly the same. Their noses, their eyes. He looks just like the man I saw earlier. He looks just like his father.*

The events of that time came flooding back to her. Began to flash through her mind again. Maria kneaded her damp skirt, the fine fibres in the material stabbing like thorns. It hurt. She closed her eyes hoping the flashes of those events would go away. It was like squeezing your eyelids shut to keep out the sun’s rays. *I couldn’t possibly be wrong...*

The scar in the corner of Maria's eye throbbed with pain. It felt like she was being bitten by hundreds of black ants. A migraine suddenly clutched the back of her head. Maria muttered an *Our Father*. Drops of perspiration formed on her forehead growing larger until they crept down her nose. Over the scar. Then fell.

Maria wipes the perspiration off her face and looks around. She stands between the rows of clothes hangers, indecisive. Through the shop window she can see flames sparking from an electricity cable. Smoke as black as soot is billowing into the sky. "Come on, Mar. Hurry up! Run!" Ratih taps Maria on the shoulder. Maria gasps, unable to move. Unable to take a single step. Ratih grabs her but Maria resists the pull of Ratih's hand. "My bag!"

"You're mad! Leave it, Mar." "The ticket!"

"Mar, are you crazy? That's enough!" and Ratih continues to force Maria towards the front door.

The barred glass door is almost open. The iron bars are partially torn off their hinge as a result of the masses of bodies pushing against the door. Maria's eyes stare into the many eyes at the door. Red eyes. Huge. Mouths closed and open. They seem to be shouting but Maria can't hear any sound issuing from those mouths.

"Come on!"

"Wh....at?"

"This is no time for questions! Can't you hear them?" "What?"

"These kids are crazy. Run, Maria! Run!" "But..."

"You're Chinese, for god's sake!"

The voice from Ratih's clenched mouth pierces Maria's ears. It is loud and hoarse. They stare at each other blankly. Maybe because the smoke is beginning to fill the area, or maybe too because tears are clouding her vision, Ratih sees Maria's eyes are glazed over.

"Come on..."

Ratih's sweaty hand grabs hold of Maria's wrist and she heads for the emergency stairs. They break through the crowd of friends who are also running, running in all directions. They stumble several times, to a background of screams and clashing cries. Their bodies collide. Maria feels as if her head is about to explode.

“Give me a minute. My passport...” Maria is thinking of the little green book. “I just can’t leave it behind, Tih. I’m going to Singapore next week. Even if it’s just for two weeks and just to look after the shop there, but it’s on Orchard Road.

For the first time in my life I’m being paid to go overseas. And I’ll get a bonus that is double my salary. I just can’t leave my bag in my locker, can I? The passport, the ticket, the money that I haven’t got round to sending to Papa yet. My room key. Mama’s photo in front of the Temple of Heaven and Hell.”

“Mar!” Ratih interrupts her prattle. “But...”

“Look!”

Maria spins around.

People armed with stones and blunt wooden sticks are ramming the door, beating on it and the windows alongside it. The glass on the right hand side cracks. A piece of iron smashes into it. A rock crashes through the glass. Broken glass is scattered all over the floor.

The door is breached. “Burn it!”

The mob lunges in. People already inside. People who have broken in. A melee like a wasps’ nest on fire. A crowbar finishes the job on the shop window. It is smashed. Iron bars attack the shelves, smashing them. Machetes chop up mannequins. Stones pound faces. Blood everywhere.

Ratih’s hand lets go of Maria’s wrist.

The scars on Maria’s wrist throbbed. Her fingers trembled, dropping the unfinished cigarette.

“Hey! You can’t just throw your rubbish anywhere.” The man had stood up and come back over to her. He picked up the cigarette from the footpath. “I didn’t end up going to Lucky Plaza. I don’t have time. I’m afraid Papa will be looking for me, and he’ll be angry. He has high blood pressure too, you know. Eh, I see there are lots of Indonesians in Singapore. You seem to be at home here. Perhaps you’re attracted to its cleanliness and order? And you get paid in dollars? Papa was adamant about getting treatment here...”

The man sat down beside Maria. She responded by pulling her thighs together. She rubbed the scars on the palms of her hands on her skirt and the cigarette packet fell. She picked it up and placed it between them. Perhaps to create some sort of barrier. Although the man’s lips were still moving, still talking, Maria’s ears didn’t take in a word of

it.

Maria's ears suddenly refuse to register sound. Unable to hear a thing, she keeps running down the emergency stairs.

The heels of her shoes repeatedly catching in the iron strips on the steps, she runs on, her heart pounding. A shoe comes off. The palm of her hand gets cut on the stair railing. She keeps running.

They are close.

Maria is almost at the last step. Just three more to go. She jumps. The little toe of her left foot gets caught in a crack in the cement.

"There..."

"Allah is Great..." "Burn it!"

The shouts are directed into her ears. And not only coming from the men chasing her. From voices ahead of her too.

"Hey. Here's another one."

"Patience, you'll get her too in a minute." "It's my turn, right? She's pure..."

Maria runs back in the direction from which she came. Her breathing keeping pace with her faltering steps. They are getting closer. There is nowhere to go. A wall is blocking her way. Maria climbs it, scraping her knee on the flaking wall. The wound on the palm of her hand is bleeding.

She falls.

Eight men besiege her. Lunge. They close in on her, their bodies reeking of smoke, some holding broken glass in their hands. Others gripping canes. Clutching sickle handles.

Maria backs away.

One pair of hands is empty. Maria stares into the face of the man with the empty hands. Unblinking, hoping to arouse compassion. But the hands are pulling at Maria's legs. She topples over and her head strikes first the wall then the edge of a rubbish bin.

"Rape her!"

Maria begins to lose consciousness. But she can still distinctly hear the voice of that man. She can still clearly picture his face.

Maria's heart was beating fast. She took out a cigarette and lit it. Inhaled. Exhaled the smoke until she'd emptied all the air out of her lungs.

"I talk too much, don't I? We've been chatting all this time but we haven't even introduced ourselves yet. I'm Agus. If you're like Mei Lang, I mean if you're an interpreter too, I'd like to ask for your help. Papa needs an interpreter, so... um, can you help him? It's not that I don't want to be here with Papa, but I also have a family. My only child has just started junior high school and I don't feel comfortable about leaving her for too long, especially as she's a girl. Jakarta's very volatile just now. Not safe. What if she got kidnapped, or raped? O dear, I can't even bear to think about it. Rape is the most heinous of crimes. It's contemptible! If you get stabbed, maybe you'll get better in a couple of weeks. But just imagine the victims of rape.... They'd probably be afraid to have a family. Some can't even have children. And some even go completely mad. Trauma like that lasts a lifetime. Horrifying, isn't it?"

Maria's head moved spontaneously. It could have been a nod or just a meaningless physical response.

"So, it's not that I don't love and honour my parents. But I worry about my family too. Papa actually agreed to come here alone as long as he had some help. Papa fully understands the meaning of family. For him family is number one. Even though he's from a military background he's a nice person. A good man. Doesn't make a fuss. You've gone pale. When you met Papa just now the same thing happened. Are you ill?"

Maria can't open her eyes properly. She has difficulty moving her legs. She is crouching beneath a sky that looks like burnt out ruins. Cracks. Darkness. In the corner of her eye blood is coagulating. Her work pants appear to be torn. Her bra straps are broken. Her shirt buttons are stuck to her shoulder. Her body is sticky. It smells of smoke and semen. Her thighs are paralysed. Her groin is numb as if a thousand rusty nails had been hammered in there.

Maria moves the bottle of mineral water. Drops of condensation have turned to liquid. With her hand she wipes the circular mark made by the wet base of the bottle. The circle thins out as it dries. *What can I do? Turn my left cheek after the right has been slapped?*

Maria's right hand pressed numbers on her cell phone.

"Mei Lang, are you still in Dr Foo's rooms? Yes, this is Maria.... Let me be an interpreter for the patient from Jakarta.... O, my god.... It's okay.... Really.... Hmm, solid....

Okay.... Thanks a lot.”

“So, you will help. Thank you. I’m happy to offer you a bit extra. Not much, mind you, but enough.... Gosh, thanks a lot, Okay. In a minute we’ll go up and see Papa together.”

Maria picked up the bottle of mineral water. With wet fingers she undid the cap and slowly sucked on the straw. *Stage four cancer means he doesn’t have long. What’s wrong with me helping? Maybe I can even speed things up a bit.*

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