

This scene is from Chapter Two of the book, and is one of the flashbacks to Jack Sparrow's life in Shipwreck Cove when he was 20 years old. As we join Jack, he's just entered the big chamber we saw in "At World's End" where the Pirate Lords convene.

Jack wasn't invited to this pirate VIP pow wow; he's crashed the meeting of some of the Pirate Lords because he's very interested in meeting a certain attractive young pirate damsel, granddaughter of the current Pirate Lord of the Caribbean.

As Jack entered the meeting room, every face in the room turned to him, eyes wary. Hands felt for weapons, but then, as they recognized him, the Pirate Lords relaxed—except for the Keeper of the Code. Edward Teague's expression darkened, then he made a discreet brushing away gesture with two fingers. The meaning was clear. *Go away.*

Jack pretended not to notice it. "Good afternoon, lovely ladies," he said, doffing his hat and making his most elegant bow, "and esteemed gentlemen."

A small ripple of amusement ran around the gathering. Pirates loved to be mistaken for gentry, no matter what their country of origin. It was one reason that they tended to dress expensively—if somewhat flamboyantly—when they went out in public in a "safe" place such as Tortuga, certain strongholds on the Madagascar coast, and, of course, Shipwreck Cove.

"My apologies for my tardiness," Jack continued, smoothly. "I needed to assume more . . . suitable . . . attire." Don Rafael chuckled good-humoredly, Mistress Ching smiled, Villanueva laughed and saluted Jack with his wine goblet, and Borya's teeth flashed in the dimness. Esmeralda gave him a brief, unreadable glance.

Teague's scarred, lined features never moved, but his eyes were hard and his voice harsh. "If you must come in, Jacky boy, sit down and stop babbling."

Ignoring him, Jack sashayed into the room, halted beside Esmeralda's chair, then greeted Mistress Ching, Borya, and Villanueva individually. Taking a breath, he inclined his head toward the head of the table, still without making eye contact. "And our esteemed Keeper of the Code, Captain Teague, of course," he added.

Villanueva, who was evidently on his second or third goblet of wine, suddenly straightened up. "Jack," he said in his heavily accented English, "that reminds me, you owe—"

Jack smiled and bowed again. "I am leagues ahead of you, my dear captain," he said loftily, removing a small purse from inside his belt. He shook it, and it clinked. Handing it to the Pirate Lord with a flourish, he added, "and thank you so much, *Señor*. I included a bit extra to recompense you for your patience."

Villanueva muttered his own thanks, then quickly counted the coins before stowing the little purse away.

Jack didn't wait for the pirate to finish counting, but instead bowed slightly to Don Rafael and his granddaughter. "Mistress Ching, I see we have another gentleman and a young lady present. May I prevail upon you to provide an introduction?"

The blind old Chinese woman laughed softly. She'd always found Jack amusing. "Don Rafael, Doña Esmeralda, allow me to present to you, Jack Sparrow, Captain Teague's . . ." her momentary pause was hardly discernible, "protégé."

Jack bowed again, more deeply this time, to Don Rafael, then more deeply still to Lady Esmeralda. "Captain," he murmured, "Lady Esmeralda."

They returned his greetings. Jack was disappointed that Esmeralda didn't extend her hand. Nevertheless, he was now where he'd aimed to be, so he pulled out the chair next to her and sat down.

Teague sat up straighter. “Let’s return to what we were discussing before the interruption,” he said, his voice flat. “I’ve concluded that we must take action regarding these rogue pirates. If these blackguards continue to plunder and menace merchant shipping, it won’t be long before England, France, Spain and probably Portugal will dispatch their navies to hunt down all pirate ships they find. They won’t distinguish between those of us that keep to the Code, and these rogue pirates...these Code breakers.”

Borya Palachnik made a brief, slashing gesture. “Four months ago, off coast of English colony name of Virginia, we saw smoke of burning. We sail to investigate. Nothing left but a burning ship, and wreckage in water. Only living thing was cabin boy clutching an oar, floating on water. Child told us he escaped death only by burrowing under bodies of slain. Pah! These cowards, they not pirates, but butchers!”

Mistress Ching, who commanded a formidable fleet of her own, larger than even the Chinese Emperor’s fleet, shook her head, her blind, white eyes gleaming eerily in the lantern light. “We have not seen any sign of them in the waters near the Chinese coasts,” she said.

“They have been preying off the coast of Spain,” Villanueva said. “And they operate as Borya has described. We have found two burning wrecks, and other ships have simply vanished like this!” Holding up his scarred right hand, he snapped his fingers.

Just then, one of Teague’s retainers entered, a cashiered old pirate who bobbed his grizzled head respectfully at the gathering, then murmured softly to the Keeper. Teague nodded to him. “Ladies, gentlemen, let us continue our discussion over dinner.”

The guards opened the doors, and former crewmen, too old for shipboard service, began carrying in trays of food and more goblets of wine. They bustled back and forth, as the conversation among the assembled Pirate Lords turned to more general, less confidential

subjects. Jack covertly glanced at Esmeralda, trying to catch her eye, but she was determinedly not looking at him. Realizing that she was even aware of him cheered him greatly.

Reynaldo, a former helmsman with a pronounced limp placed a plate before him. Jack murmured his thanks, then sat poised as he slid Lady Esmeralda's plate before her. As he'd anticipated, she glanced up at Reynaldo to thank him. As her eyes met his, Jack flashed her a quick smile, and had the satisfaction of seeing her hastily look back down at her food. Unless he was mistaken in the dim light, she was blushing.

Scarcely noticing what was on his plate, Jack began eating, wondering how to get a conversation between them started. Should he wait for her to speak? Perhaps that would be best...

By now the Pirate Lords were busily discussing recent events and absent friends, exchanging information and gossip. Jack heard Don Rafael say, "You'll never guess who I encountered at Oporto a few months ago!"

"Who was that?" Teague asked, pouring more wine for his fellow Pirate Lords.

"James."

Teague's eyebrows rose, and Villanueva exclaimed, "*Dios mio!* I thought he must have met with a rope long ago! It has been years!"

"It has been many years," agreed Don Rafael. "I thought the same thing. But there he was, sitting at a table in a little *taberna*, eating." He took a bite of his own food, chewed, then added, "He's lost a hand."

"You spoke with him, *da?*" Borya asked.

"Of course. I walked over and joined him. He seemed startled, but glad to see me. When I asked him later on how he was managing without the hand, he said that it wasn't so bad, the

hook was as good as a dagger in a fight.”

“So where has he been keeping himself?” Villanueva asked.

“I asked him, but he wouldn’t say. Prison? That doesn’t seem likely, all these years,” Don Rafael shrugged. “And it’s not as though they lock us up.”

Jack swallowed hard. Everyone knew the penalty for piracy. He’d seen the gibbets too many times, with their dangling bodies.

“Aside from the lost hand, how did he seem?” Teague asked.

Don Rafael shook his head, his expression puzzled. “It was strange, *Eduardo*. He commented on this,” the pirate lord ran a hand over his thick gray hair, which touched his shoulders, “since the last time we were together, I barely had any gray. But he didn’t look a day older. Not a day.”

Jack’s attention was suddenly far more focused. *Interesting . . . I wouldn’t mind not aging . . .*

“Odd,” Teague admitted. Few pirates lived to be old, and the few that did had features that betrayed their years.

“Did he brag as much as he used to?” Mistress Ching asked.

“No, and that was strange, too,” Don Rafael replied. “James was a lot more . . . subdued. You remember his temper. He’d fly into such rages.”

Villanueva gulped wine, then nodded. “I kept expecting his crew to slit his throat in his sleep and send him to Davy Jones. But they were all too frightened of him.”

“The night I saw him, he held his temper—and his tongue,” Don Rafael said. “Very closed-mouthed, he was. I only saw his composure disturbed once during the meal. The *taberna* keeper’s little lad came round to collect our plates, and when he turned and saw him, for just a

second he looked—scared. No, worse than that. Terrified.” Don Rafael held out his wine goblet to be refilled. “Can you imagine that? Afraid! Of a young boy!”

Silence fell, as the Pirate Lords contemplated Don Rafael’s strange account. Jack stole another glance at Esmeralda as she carefully patted her lips with her serviette. Reminded by her example, he used his own, not his sleeve.

Teague sipped wine, then cleared his throat. “We should return to our subject,” he said, inclining his head courteously to the Pirate Lord of the Caribbean. “That is, if you were finished, Don Rafael?”

“Oh, si!” the Pirate Lord said. “I am sorry, forgive an old man’s gossip. I actually had a point to make. Just before we parted company, James mentioned that he had come upon a man, half dead, floating in the sea. They pulled him out, and before he died, he told them a story similar to the ones I have heard here today. He said it happened off the coast of India. It seems these villains are everywhere.” He paused, then glanced meaningfully at Teague and added, “And then of course, there was the other story I heard. . . .”

“Excuse me . . . Señor Sparrow?” said a soft voice in cultured accents. “Would you please pass the bread?”

Jack quickly turned his attention back to Esmeralda, pleased that she’d spoken to him. Quickly, he passed the loaf to her. “Thank you, Señor,” she said, cutting away busily.

“You are most welcome.” Now that he had an opening, Jack was quick to follow the advantage. “How long have you been sailing with Don Rafael, Doña Esmeralda?”

He was rewarded with a little smile, and his heart jumped. “Since I was fifteen. Eleven years, now.”

“All the Pirate Lords speak well of him,” Jack said. “He’s held in great respect.”

Hearing this praise of her grandfather brought another smile. Lady Esmeralda buttered her bread. “He is my hero. We are the only family left to each other. After my parents died, he decided I must become a fine lady, perhaps serve at court, so he put me in a convent school in Barcelona. I missed him—and the sea—so much.” Her smile took on a touch of irony. “I hadn’t been there a month before I knew I wasn’t destined for the court of his majesty.”

“I’ve never been to school,” Jack said. “I can barely imagine what it would be like. What did you do?”

“I applied myself to my studies, and went without sweets so I could pay for fencing lessons in secret. After I had learned all they thought proper for a woman to know, I ran away from the school and found him. I was fifteen.”

“He didn’t try to take you back to Barcelona?”

She laughed softly. “Not directly. Instead, he brought me to Shipwreck Cove. I think he thought that I’d be so horrified by the exposure to pirate life that I’d agree to go back to the nuns. Instead, I loved the life. I’ve been with him ever since.”

Jack calculated, then was glad the room wasn’t better lit, because he could feel heat in his face. “So . . . that time when I teased you and yanked your braids . . . you had just come here from a *convent*?”

Esmeralda, taking in his expression, giggled. “Would it have hurt worse, to know you’d been trounced by a girl from a convent?”

Jack’s sense of the ridiculous saved him, and he flashed her a grin. “Yes, I suppose it would have. The bruises hurt badly enough. Teague wanted to know which of his men had thrashed me.”

“What did you tell him?”

“I was in a bit of a quandary,” Jack admitted. “I couldn’t tell him the truth, of course, and I didn’t want to identify anyone because Teague can be . . . rough . . . on those who annoy him.”

“I’ve heard,” she said, softly. “So what did you do?”

“I didn’t say anything,” Jack said.

Esmeralda shook her head. Her thick, black hair, softly curling, was held back from her face by tortoiseshell combs. Jack found himself imagining what it would be like to run his hands through that hair. Hastily, he looked down and took a random bite of food. “What did Teague do to you for not telling him?” she whispered, after a moment.

Jack picked up his wine goblet, and took a sip. “He gave me a worse hiding than you did,” he said, after a moment, careful to keep his tone light.

“*Dios mio*,” she said, softly. “I’m sorry . . .” she hesitated, and he could tell she was wondering how to address him.

“Jack. Please.”

“Very well. I am sorry . . . Jack.”

“Don’t be,” he said. “I’m sure I deserved it. Taught me a valuable lesson.”

“And that was?” Her English was very fluent, with just a delightful hint of an accent.

“First impressions can be very deceiving,” Jack replied. “I’ll never again underestimate an opponent . . . or a lady.” He tipped his goblet toward her in a small salute, then drank.

Her eyes widened, then narrowed slightly, and she, in turn, reached for her goblet. After she’d sipped her wine, she looked back up at him, and her dark eyes danced with mischief.

“That’s a valuable lesson,” she agreed, mock-solemn. “You’ve certainly learned a lot of things since the last time we met. Who taught you to be charming?”

Jack looked at her, and smiled, a slow, genuine smile. “Do you like to fish, Doña

Esmeralda?”

“Sometimes,” she said, then added slowly. “I like swimming better. Are there still good places to swim on the other side of the island?”

“There are,” Jack said. “Would you like to sail around the island and find some of those places? With me?”

“That would please me, Jack,” she said. “And please, call me Esmeralda?”

“Nothing would please me more . . . Esmeralda.”

Jack smiled at her. He realized his plate was empty, though he couldn’t recall a single thing he’d eaten. Servitors quickly cleared away the remainder of the meal. When they had finished, Teague stood up. “Brethren of the Coast,” he said, formally. “Don Rafael brought with him a man that I want you to meet. He is one of us, a man on the account, and he, of all of us, has personally witnessed the actions of these rogue pirates. I want you to hear what he has to say.”

A scar-faced man wearing a huge, battered hat strode in, and then halted beside Teague.

“Ladies, gentlemen, allow me present to you, Captain Hector Barbossa.”

Captain Barbossa stepped up to the table and stood before the assembled Pirate Lords. Teague indicated a chair, but he shook his grizzled head. “Thankee, Captain Teague, but I prefer to stand,” he said, in a gravelly voice.

As he stood there, gazing down at each of the pirate lords in turn, Jack found himself covertly studying the man with some curiosity. Barbossa had an accent that he couldn’t quite place, and he was usually good at that kind of thing. *West Country. Cornwall, perhaps?*

Jack estimated he was in his early forties. His weather-beaten features with the scraggly beard wouldn’t have been handsome even if they’d been unmarred. His clothing was old and battered, stained with salt and other, less pleasant, substances. But his baldric was well oiled, and

his weapons were clean. His eyes were sharp; they missed nothing.

“Gents . . . Ladies . . .” Barbossa said, inclining his head, “’Tis lucky I am to be standing here afore ye today. Two months ago, almost to the day, me ship *Cobra* was attacked and sunk by one of our own. We had raised our true colors, and yet still they tried to slaughter us. We were attacked by one of our own brethren . . . a clear violation of the Code, ’twas.”

His accented speech was so affectedly “salty” Jack half expected him to say “Arrrrr” at any moment. And yet, despite the accented, rough speech, here was a man of some intelligence, perhaps even a man with some education.

Teague nodded. “Please tell us the entire story, Captain Barbossa.”

“Aye, Cap’n Teague,” Barbossa said. “And hard tellin’ it be, sir. Every time I think about me poor Polly . . .” he hesitated, and an expression of genuine sorrow flickered across his face. Jack was surprised to see it. Barbossa impressed him as a tough, no-holds-barred pirate, someone who would make a formidable opponent in a fight—a good swordsman, but not one to abide by prissy rules. Here was a man who would knock you down and kick your teeth in as easily as look at you, if you were unwise enough to cross him.

“Who is this Polly?” Mistress Chin demanded, “Your doxy?”

Barbossa looked rather shocked. “Course not, ma’am. ’Tis bad luck to be bringing a woman aboard a ship. Polly ain’t—warn’t—human.”

“Polly, that is the English name of a parrot,” Villaneuva observed.

“I did have a parrot named Polly once,” Barbossa admitted. “A fine bird he was, but he messed up the shoulder of me jacket.” Jack saw the hint of something that might have been sardonic humor flash across his features, and realized Barbossa was indulging in a bit of irony. The grizzled pirate sighed theatrically. “But the Polly I lost after the battle was me little monkey.

Pretty little thing, she was. Understood every word I said to her.”

Teague cleared his throat, and a touch of impatience showed in his normally impassive features. “Tell us about the battle, Captain Barbossa,” he urged.

Jack watched as Barbossa hesitated. *He came here to tell his tale*, he thought. *Why doesn't he?* For a moment he was puzzled, then understanding dawned. Here was a man who was so accustomed to being devious, that even when he *wanted* to tell the straightforward truth, it was difficult for him to do.

“Aye, well.” Barbossa thought for a moment, then straightened his shoulders as though he were about to cross swords. “Let me just tell it as it happened, gents and ladies. Me ship was a tidy little schooner name of *Cobra*. We were sailin’ in waters north of Bermuda, on our way back from an encounter we’d had with a Frenchy barque. Took a nice haul, we did. Ivory. We were ridin’ low in the water, so laden we be. Then me topman spies a sail. We thought we’d take a look, so we changed course, and they must have spotted us, too, because they did likewise.”

Jack leaned forward, listening intently. Lady Esmeralda touched his sleeve with her fingertips and he turned to her. She gave a slight shake of her head. “He told his story to us on the voyage to Shipwreck Cove,” she murmured, for his hearing alone. “It is most disturbing.”

Barbossa continued, “When we spied that sail, it was already late in the afternoon, and it took us a few hours to approach each other. I told me men to run up a Frenchy ensign, in honor of our rich cargo. And the stranger, he did the same—showed Dutch colors. Finally, not too long afore sunset, we came within long gun range of each other. I’d been studyin’ him through me spyglass, and I had me suspicions. The ship was a sloop, Bermuda rigged, common vessel, especially in these parts. I caught a few glimpses of the crew, and even at that distance they didn’t seem as though they were wearin’ the right clothin’ for merchantmen. So I orders me crew to run

up me black flag.

“The moment we raised our true colors, that sloop, he run up his flag, too. A red flag, with a black demon skull on it. ’Twas then I knew for certain that he was another pirate. We all had a good laugh, me and me crew. We waved at ’em. They waved back. Then I gives the order to come about, to put our rudder to ’em. The Code calls for us all to respect our fellows on the account, and I was abiding by it.”

“On the account” was pirate slang for piracy. Jack saw the Keeper of the Code nod approvingly as Barbossa described his actions. “What happened then?”

“We’d no sooner put our stern to ’em than the blackguards fired on us! I’d noticed a big, fancy ornamented brass bow-chaser on his vessel through me glass. Indian work, it looked to be. Fired a big shot . . . ninepounder, maybe. The first one missed us, but the second one got us, and blew our rudder to flinders. *Cobra* began taking on water. I used me sails and threw out me anchor to turn her, and returned fire. Broadsided ’em good, we did.”

Barbossa’s words were weaving a spell in the room, Jack realized, glancing at the Pirate Lords. Each of them was listening with an expression that said, clearer than words, that the captain’s account was bringing back memories of hard-fought engagements.

Barbossa’s voice grew a bit rougher, as if remembering this part was almost painful. “They shot back, of course, and we battled till the air was so thick with smoke that you could scarce see your target, save by the muzzle flashes from her gun-ports. It was a fight, it was. Half me men were dead or dyin’ when I realized that the sun must have set. By that time I knew there was no hope for me poor *Cobra*, she was sinking fast. I knew darkness was our only chance to escape, so I gives the order to abandon ship. Half our boats had been reduced to kindlin’ but we still had a few that were seaworthy.”

Jack, envisioning the situation, swallowed hard as he reached for his wine goblet. He'd been on a foundering ship before, following a losing battle, and Barbosa's story brought the memories back. The smell of the blood mixed with the acrid tang of burned powder. The screams, moans and curses of the wounded. The deck, slippery with blood and spilt entrails, beneath one's boots . . . and the smoke, making your eyes water, the tears making clean trails down the blackened faces of the gunnery crew . . .

Barbosa stood there, looking at the expressions on the faces of his listeners, and nodded. "You all know what it was like. We launched the boats as best we could, but several of 'em tipped as they lowered, spillin' some of us into the sea. The gunnery crew kept firin' to hide our effort, and then leaped into the water just as *Cobra* began to go down. A dozen of 'em got sucked down with the ship.

"I was in the water, no boat within reach. Me poor Polly had been holdin' on to me shoulder. She was wearin' her little blue dress, but suddenly she wasn't there and I couldn't see her. I swam under, gropin' through the water and the wreckage, tryin' to find her, but she was gone. When I came up to breathe, ready to dive again, even though I knew 'twas hopeless, two of me crew, witless one-eyed Ragetti and his grinnin' imp of a friend Pintel, grabbed me jacket and pulled me into their boat. Fools they be, but I'm grateful to 'em.

"Only the darkness saved us, for they sent out boats to kill those they found alive in the water. Hard to say which was worse, them or the sharks. We heard that devil crew laughin' when men screamed as they were pulled under. Davy Jones's locker be too good for soulless wretches like that." Barbosa took a deep breath, then added, "We stayed quiet, muffling our oars with our clothes as we rowed away. We rowed in shifts, silent that whole night. When dawn reached us, there was no sign of that cursed ship and her crew of murdering blackguards."

He drew a deep breath. “There’s little more to tell. We managed to reach an island, and by good fortune it wasn’t barren. We built a signal fire. A week or thereabouts of tending it, and a ship—men on the account—dropped anchor and sent a boat to see who we were. They took us to Tortuga, and there we met Don Rafael, who told me the Pirate Lords currently present at Shipwreck Cove would want t’ hear me story. Which is how I came t’ be standin’ here before ye today.”

Barbossa fell silent, seeming drained by the recitation.

Borya, Pirate Lord of the Caspian, was the first to break the silence that filled the chamber. “Monsters, not men, da?” he said, quietly. Then, so suddenly that Jack jumped, the little Russian slammed his dagger down into the scarred tabletop, so it stood, point-down, quivering, and added, “Such evil deserves only death from us, Captain Teague.”

Jack glanced at the little man, and saw a flash of something behind his spectacles. Pity? Anger? Some strong emotion, it had been. And yet, Borya’s words, despite his violent gesture, had been spoken in a level voice, completely dispassionately. Jack frowned, struck by the contrast between that gesture and those words, and how they had been voiced.

The Keeper of the Code indicated a seat at the table. “Please sit down, Captain Barbossa. We would like you to remain for our discussion.” Teague nodded at the servitor. “Some wine for the captain.”

“Thankee, Cap’n Teague,” Barbossa said, seating himself. He took the wine goblet that was offered to him, and drained it in a few loud gulps. “Thirsty work,” he announced, setting it back down. “You’d think it would grow easier in the tellin’ . . . but it doesn’t.”

“The Butcher is right, code breakers deserve only death from us,” Mistress Ching announced. Her sightless eyes shone eerily in the dimness.

“As the Keeper has pointed out, the navies of the world will not discriminate between them and us,” Villanueva said. “These rogues could take us all down with them.”

“We should find them and deal with them,” Don Rafael said. “We know the seas better than any naval vessel.”

“We do, *da*,” Borya said. “*Koldunya* stands ready to find rogue vessel and capture her.”

Jack surprised himself by speaking up. “It seems to me that there must be more than one vessel. After listening to so many reports, there are just too many encounters or near-encounters for one vessel to be causing them all.”

Teague gave him a glance, and it was clear that the Keeper was surprised to hear Jack say something relevant and sensible. He did not speak, however, only nodded.

“Aye, lad,” Barbossa said. “From what Don Rafael told me, you’re making sense. Too many attacks within a short time period, too widely spaced. Can’t be the work of a single devil ship.” He gave Jack a measuring glance. “And who be ye, lad?”

“Jack Sparrow,” Jack replied, with a cordial nod. “It’s always regrettable to hear about the loss of a good ship, Captain Barbossa.”

The man nodded back. “Aye, ’tis. And when we find the scurvy blackguard responsible, he can apologize to me little Polly personally, in Davy Jones’s locker.” As his gaze met Jack’s, Hector Barbossa grinned, a brief, grim flash of stained teeth, and added, “I’ll volunteer to stand executioner, Cap’n Teague. There’s nothing I’d like more than to make each of those devils a hemp cravat. Shooting’s too good for the likes of scum like that.”

In a few more minutes the meeting broke up. Jack rose, as did Esmeralda. But Don Rafael remained sitting, as he and Teague continued to question Captain Barbossa.

Esmeralda laid a hand on her grandfather’s shoulder. “I’m tired, grandfather. I’d like to

return to my cabin, if you don't mind."

"Of course. *mi corazón*." Don Rafael, said, patting her hand and smiling up at her. "I'll summon one of my men to escort Lady Esmeralda back to *Venganza*," Teague said.

Jack seized this golden opportunity, and, ignoring the Keeper's warning frown, stepped forward, bowing deeply to the Pirate Lord of the Caribbean. "Don Rafael, I would be honored to accompany the Lady Esmeralda back to your vessel."

Esmeralda gave Jack a sidewise glance, then smiled. "Why, that would be very nice. Thank you, Jack." Jack bowed to her, then formally crooked his arm. Esmeralda placed her hand on it, still smiling at him with a warmth that made his head swim, far more than the wine he'd drunk.

"Thank you, lad," Don Rafael said, giving him a smile and a nod.

Jack resolutely refused to look at Teague as he escorted Esmeralda out of the chamber.

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