

Author's note: Hello! And thank you for helping inspire me to start working on this story. It is meant to encapsulate the three-week gap between Chapter 24 and 25 of Half-Blood Prince, and to better elaborate on the relationship between Harry and Ginny during Harry's sixth year. -Eric James

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"Quid agis?" he said tentatively to the Fat Lady, wondering what he would find inside.

Her expression was unreadable as she replied, "You'll see."

And she swung forward.

A roar of celebration erupted from the hole behind her. Harry gaped as people began to scream at the sight of him; several hands pulled him into the room.

"We won!" yelled Ron, bounding into sight and brandishing the silver Cup at Harry. "We won! Four hundred and fifty to a hundred and forty! We won!"

Harry looked around; there was Ginny running toward him; she had a hard, blazing look on her face as she threw her arms around him. And without thinking, without planning it, without worrying about the fact that fifty people were watching, Harry kissed her.

*After several long moments — or it might have been half an hour — or possibly several sunlit days — they broke apart. **HBP24, p.533***

*The room had gone very quiet. Then several people wolf-whistled and there was an outbreak of nervous giggling... [Harry] grinned down at Ginny and gestured wordlessly out of the portrait hole. A long walk in the grounds seemed indicated, during which — if they had time — they might discuss the match. **HBP24, p.534***

----- untitled Harry/Ginny fanfic, by Eric Scull -----

1.

Once when he was very small, he couldn't have been more than five years of age, Harry visited the sea. The Dursleys, whose home was being renovated at the time, reluctantly brought him along with them to Suffolk in eastern England. They spent the day on the pier, taking in the sights, eating fish and chips (Harry got what little Dudley didn't want) and sitting on the beach.

While Dudley fussed as Aunt Petunia attempted to spread some sun cream across his (even then) ample belly, Harry looked out towards the horizon at the English Channel, seeing it for the first time with his own eyes. He couldn't have said what it was that he felt, watching the tide rise and fall, seamen's buoys in the distance bobbing along as if adrift in one great bathtub. But Harry felt something, some sense of longing within him that he hadn't known before. And so he walked.

The Dursleys were occupied with Dudley; Uncle Vernon had gone off to seek ice cream at his demand. And so Harry, with no formal swim training, stepped into the water at the edge of the shore. The day was hot - bright and sunny in the upper 20's - but the water was cold... much colder than Harry was expecting, and this gave him pause. But moments later, with the water covering his feet, Harry felt a distant warmth seem to wash over him as well. He walked forward some more.

At waist height, Harry thought he must have been mistaken about the warmth, for the water was well and truly frigid. He considered turning back... the day was much nicer on land than in the sea. But as he gazed into the distance, to people in boats, to faraway shadows fishing off the edge of the pier, Harry was again entranced by a feeling of belonging which seemed to exist not behind him, but ahead. Harry had gone about 7 meters now and was up to his neck in the cold English Channel. He turned around. Dudley was still fussing, but Petunia had succeeded in covering his front side with the sun cream and was working diligently now on the extremities like his ears and the back of his neck. Vernon was still nowhere in sight. Taking comfort at that, Harry plunged his head beneath the water.

With his eyes closed, his head fully submerged, a silence befell Harry as the weight of the sea closed completely around him. The whines of his cousin, the distant hum of boat motors, and a hundred other sounds were suddenly stopped. And when Harry opened his eyes, it was to see very little. The water was dark even in spite of the many sunbeams that fell on top of it. Harry was crouching with his feet on the seabed, in kind of a half sit. And when he realized that he couldn't see anything or hear anything beyond the tumult of tiny waves, he briefly panicked and stood up.

Once more among the land of the living, fresh sound invaded Harry's ears as he shook his soggy black hair out of his face and took stock of the scene. He had left the world for twenty seconds or so... and the world was pretty much the same as it was when he had left it. Breathing deeply a few times, Harry silently crouched down and went below the water once more.

This time, Harry noticed that the water was not entirely silent. The oppressive weight of the water against both of his eardrums kind of made its own noise; Harry became aware of a quiet swishing as his hands came down loosely by his side. There was a dull hiss that seemed very far away, not the sound of a living creature but perhaps of the water itself, far below the surface where the water clapped in waves. The warmth that Harry felt now, as he paid closer attention to the sea, was that same feeling he had just felt while looking out into the horizon. It was like he belonged here. Down, beneath the surface, away from his family, away from people. He could feel, and almost hear his own heart beating now as he exhaled the last of his breath and watched as it bubbled to the surface.

When he rose, it was to hear Aunt Petunia's startled scream. She had looked over at the water just to see him emerge from it. Harry got the distinct impression that, until now, she hadn't

known he had gone. Angrily, with an arm around Dudley as if to shield him from having the same bad idea that Harry had, she demanded he get out of the water that instant. Harry considered disobeying, but the feeling of deep peace blossoming inside him had retreated. Several other people were starting to look on. Petunia noticed that other people were noticing, and her tone became even more urgent. Harry, with reluctance, got out. When Vernon returned five minutes later, Harry was promptly punished for wandering off. But the exact form of punishment he received is blessedly lost to time...

Kissing Ginny Weasley at last, while a whole Common Room full of people gazed on, reminded a part of Harry (a part that was just below the conscious) about his experience in the English sea. For when they kissed for the first time, Harry felt the same sense of sensory deprivation he had when submerging underwater on that sunny day. Then, there was only the ocean to be heard. And now, there was only Ginny. The sound that her mouth made when he kissed it - only the faintest trace of a word escaping her lips before he pressed his against hers. The feel of her body as it relaxed into his touch, what was going to be an embrace now turning into so much more. Ginny was an ocean... and the warmth inside Harry was spreading again.

Harry's perception of sound gradually broadened from his acute awareness of the girl in his arms, the girl who not only accepted his long-awaited kiss but who was now actively *kissing him back*, and extended in a radius that seemed to grow quicker with his heartbeat. He now heard the breathing of, not just Ginny and himself, but of the nearest fellow Gryffindor students. Oddly, nobody was talking. The room HAD gone completely silent... that wasn't just the ocean of Ginny and the roaring tide within Harry which had moments ago compelled him to kiss her, distracting him. Harry could, for the briefest of moments, now hear the fire crackling at the opposite end of the Common Room, a room that was bursting full of students from all Hogwarts years.

Harry's eyes widened. Ginny seemed to have the same slow, dawning realization that Harry had about the room. But she seemed to care far less about it than he did. Everyone in the room seemed to have come out of similar trances when Harry and Ginny did, and now the first bits of nervous laughter from a group of Second Years started to reach Harry. Beyond a row of people to Harry's right, somebody wolf-whistled. And then another person. There was, at once, a cacophony of sound as applause once again broke out in the room. Moments before, the applause had been for Gryffindor's (and, in no small part, Ginny's) victory against Ravenclaw for the Quidditch cup. Now it was for them! The two of them: Harry and Ginny. And lo! As much as Harry would love to have relished this moment fully, a thought then struck him and something seemed to hitch in his throat. Harry scanned the room for Ron.

It was only when he saw Ron, saw his dumbfounded expression... and then saw it give way to a... permissive(?) nod... that Harry felt he could truly be content in the moment. He looked at Ginny. Her face bore traces of a smile. It felt like years since Harry had last looked upon it. Those soft brown eyes, locked on his again. He felt a momentary pang of guilt that he had left his gaze of her and taken in the rest of reality for that short time, but he realized, of

course, that she had too. And he now realized that she was still holding him as tightly as when they had first embraced.

Wordlessly, Harry motioned for the two of them to leave the Common Room through the portrait hole from whence he had just arrived... and the slightest squeeze from behind him, one of her hands that rested on his shoulder blades, told him to lead the way.

2.

The corridor outside of the Common Room was vacant, but the sounds of the party within could be heard through the thick stone walls as if they were a lesser material. Harry felt a surge of pride for his House just then as he walked, and could only guess that Ginny did, too. He wasn't watching her. If it weren't for her left hand gripping his right, the soft skin seeming to pulse with life and an excitement that was as much his as it was hers, he might have guessed that she stayed behind in the Common Room to drink in her success a bit more with the Gryffindor Quidditch Team.

The torches on either side of the Fat Lady's portrait had lit the way for approximately 15 feet, and only when the light had nearly extinguished and the light from another set of torches up ahead began to reach them, did Harry stop walking and turn to see Ginny. She did not speak, but she smiled. A pleasant smile. So she really was there, with him. Their kiss, which happened only moments ago, was real. And this was the hereafter moment.

"We..." Harry began, though he had no idea what the next words were going to be. "Err..." he faltered.

"There's an unused classroom just down a level, past that statue of the old witch and her cauldron," Ginny said brightly.

Harry knew that, at this hour, all the classrooms were probably unused. But she was right. The one in question was not currently host to lessons. This made it somehow more ideal to visit, for privacy. And so he smiled back and started to walk again. But he was desperate to maintain some kind of a conversation to distract him from the silence that was growing all around.

"Tell me about... the match," Harry worked out, quicker than he thought he might. "I... you know I would've been there, if not -"

"-for your detention with Snape, yeah," Ginny said, still pleasingly. "Well, I won't lie, we all kind of brought our A-Game. The Ravensclaws made some crucial errors at some critical junctures and we, well..." she grinned a bit broader than her usual, "we called them on it."

Harry was watching her now as they walked. The distant fire light flickering in and out of her chestnut brown eyes, giving them a liquid sort of appearance. Was she ever more beautiful than she was in this moment? Harry supposed she must have been, but he couldn't say when.

"Ron said it was Four hundred and fifty to -", Harry began, and Ginny cut him off, maybe a little too soon, at the mention of her brother.

"-A hundred and forty, yep!" she looked at him, her left hand still in his, but with her right, she mimed brushing off a small bug from her left shoulder and then let loose an intoxicating laugh. "Katie was in top form! The best I've ever seen her. Clearly wanted to prove herself now that she's back. She and Demelza, they racked up most of the starter goals and Dean," Ginny hesitated for just a moment, seemingly having realized at the same time Harry did that they had just reached the topic of her ex, "was also great. The Ravenclaw's strategy seemed to be a strong offense, but next to us... with our determination to not let you down..."

Harry smiled a winning smile. "Don't be ridiculous. This victory is all you guys. I've noticed it all year, this team is **really** solid. I can't take any of the credit! And had I been there, who knows what would have happened? But it couldn't have been a better outcome than this, surely."

The casual tone of their conversation was nice, Harry thought, as they reached a small stairwell leading down to some sixth-floor classrooms. Had Ginny always been this easy to talk to?

"Well, now the cup is ours!" said Ginny, and she half-skipped down the first two steps ahead of him. Harry let out a brief whoop of playful delight that came genuinely enough. During his detention with Snape mere hours ago, Harry never would have supposed the night would end this way, with a late-night stroll to some place where no one else was... just the two of them.

And then an image came to Harry, a memory of only a few moments before. Dean Thomas, holding a broken glass in his hand. Standing out among the crowd of excited Gryffindors and succeeding at being the only member of the Cup-winning team likely not to be enjoying himself at this very moment. The pit fell out of Harry's stomach briefly. It was not guilt, per se. It was something else.

"What's wrong?" Ginny asked, casually. She had reached the first landing and turned around. Even in the low light, Harry guessed his sudden wince at remembering the look on Dean's face was transparent. Harry attempted quickly to reset his expression.

"Nothing!" he said, with an attempt at lightheartedness as he reached the landing and closed the gap between them. His hand reached out to hold hers again and for a moment, she hesitated.

"Come on," Ginny spoke. She took his hand and interlaced her fingers with his in a move that sent electricity through Harry's entire right side. "What's eating you?"

"D-dean," Harry said, recovering from her touch only well enough to feign speech. "He, uh, seemed pretty shocked."

Ginny seemed to think for the smallest measurable moment of time before saying, "Well, I'm shocked, too! You kissed me in front of the whole House!" And now she was grinning.

Harry's neurons seemed to fire so quickly now that he was quite sure his brain couldn't process information in its entirety. At first he wanted to say, "I didn't..." meaning he didn't kiss her, but that *was* what had happened, wasn't it? Thinking back to only minutes ago, he seemed to view it more like a joint thing. Her leaning in to hug him, and then... magnetic forces, the two of them... the way she spoke of it gave him so much more agency than he could remember having at the time. All that escaped Harry's lips now was a half-caught chuckle and a "Yeah!"

"Seriously! What's on your mind? I can't tell unless you tell me," Ginny offered. They started to walk again, down the remaining stairs. Harry knew that if he wanted everything to be right in the world, if he wanted this night to continue, he would have to think really quickly about what his gut wanted him to say. After spending the better part of the past six months not listening to his gut on the matter of Ginny Weasley, doing this was no small feat for Harry.

"Okay! So, uh... you dated Dean." Harry said, his eyes meeting hers.

"I did!" Ginny replied. "Until I didn't." Ginny seemed a little apprehensive as they reached the bottom landing. She was still holding his hand, but it was a loose connection. Harry could tell she was willing, nay, interested in having the conversation if it meant getting said conversation over with. He had watched her take this exact tone with Fred and George at their shop in Diagon Alley before start-of-term, when they began hounding her about Michael Corner. Michael...

"And," Harry continued after a brief hesitation, "Michael Corner you dated the year before," and as he said this name, he could see Ginny sour visibly. She clearly thought he was about to proceed with the same accusations, lines of questioning or draw the same assumptions as had her brothers. A moan escaped Harry's throat as Ginny let go of his hand and her deep, brown eyes narrowed as she stopped over the arch to the classroom corridor. "Wuh-wait! Ginny, I don't care! I.. you don't know what I, I am not being clear."

Fully apart from him, Ginny now leaned against the wall and made a show of picking at a nail on her hand. Looking down and seeming to be preoccupied by that, she said, quietly, "You're right. You aren't being clear."

"Well," Harry uttered, though his insides were on fire. He could feel the passion inside him to get his words out start to turn deadly. And the only antidote for this poison that was spreading was to find the words to say what he was feeling. "I've never dated anyone. Not, uh - not really." (A few misguided attempts to date Cho Chang the year previous - Cho, whom Ginny had just one-upped at Quidditch this very evening - didn't count, did it?)

Ginny took a breath. It was clear that whatever she had expected him to say, this wasn't it.

"I'm... nervous," Harry admitted. And in saying so, the bubbling feeling inside him finally eased as if he had just ingested a vial of a curing potion. The pangs in his stomach seemed to settle as he finally found the words to describe his inner turmoil. "About dating you, about... I don't know how to date."

At this, Ginny burst out laughing again. Harry was taken aback at how sudden the laughter had come, at how not moments ago he thought he may have been in some really hot water. The sound of her laughter, of course, was music to his ears. But juxtaposed with his vulnerable admission, Harry couldn't help but feel that the laughter had Fred and George's air of impropriety to it, timing-wise.

"Oh, Harry," Ginny said, seeming to cut her own laughter short at seeing his reaction once more, and she quickly came back over to him, putting both hands into his. "I know about your dating history. I mean..." she added nonchalantly, "all of Hogwarts knows. We -" and, seeing his eyes widen, "- everyone's been waiting for you to figure out you like someone, at least, we hoped you'd find some way to have some fun."

Harry didn't know what to say, about Ginny's equating dating to having some fun. In his experience, dating was fraught with much the same misunderstandings that he had experienced last year inside a certain Hogsmeade tea shop, and now nearly in this very corridor. So Harry stayed silent.

"You're always so serious! And, hey! I get it!" She grabbed at his hands now as if to tug him along, and she began walking backwards, pulling him down towards the classrooms. "You've had a lot of awful shit happen, and more is surely coming. But, we hoped... I -" now it was her turn to hesitate. "I wished it for you, that eventually you would get to have some kind of time at Hogwarts that wasn't marked by... voices in the walls, or teachers trying to kill you."

That Ginny could so casually bring up the Basilisk that lived within the Chamber of Secrets showed marked growth in the area of acceptance for what had happened to her in her first (Harry's second) year, that far exceeded Harry's expectations. He was silent. And what was this about them (and who were "they"?) wishing for his happiness? He assumed it was just Ginny and Hermione. But then he remembered the attempts of Romilda Vane to secure some of the "fun" for herself over the present school year. He pushed Romilda out of his mind immediately.

"I think you'll find," Ginny said, now leading him by just one hand and with her back fully turned to him so that he could watch the light of torches cascade down her bright ginger hair, "that a little romance can be great at taking your mind off of how terrible the world really is."

The fact that she was not facing him actually obscured her face from him and Harry didn't like being unable to read her expressions as she spoke. As he felt the distance between them, more discomfort seemed to spread inside him. "But, Ginny, you - I mean, you've had these relationships with these guys for *months*. Over two summers. They didn't work out? You're not upset?"

She turned to face him, her expression calm as can be. "No, Harry, I'm not upset. Not in the least. Michael, he... was very polite. A creative guy, lots going on in his head. It was sometimes very great seeing things from his perspective. And Dean, same thing. He's got a great heart, and knows what he wants to do with his life." She paused, making eye contact again. "The world can seem so small, Harry, when you spend it with just my family and Hermione."

Harry took a moment to consider this. Ginny's eight family members were certainly not a small group. But they were singular in their goals. At least, all but Percy seemed to have views that perfectly aligned with Harry, the world, and each other. He understood what she was saying.

"That makes sense," Harry admitted.

"Thank you!" Ginny replied, and in the distance, Harry could see the statue of the witch with her cauldron nearing their view.

"I guess I just," Harry sighed, and Ginny slowed her pace a little, listening, "I worry that I won't, uhmm, I don't know the first thing about dating or kissing or..."

"Well, your kissing is fine, considering your practice," Harry's heart fell once more and Ginny quickly picked it up "and that's the whole point! If you like a girl, kiss her, Harry. If she likes you back, it's something you'll work on together!"

Ginny spoke so matter-of-factly about this and really made it seem so simple. Harry felt insecure, for having made himself so vulnerable in this moment and so timid, when back upstairs he had simply swooped in without a thought or care for the world beyond him and Ginny. The walk downstairs had seemed to become a falling action which laid bare the consequences of thoughtless thinking. Harry powered on. The statue of the witch, and the door frame beyond it, were now clearly visible and just ahead.

"I, really like you, Ginny." Harry blurted out. This time she turned directly at him once more and smiled, seeming to will more words out of him so she could watch him say them. "This is... uh... new to me. But I'm sure of that. You're... you're great. And really fierce, and..." Harry would have added more qualifiers, but Ginny had put her finger to his lips. She seemed to be set on saying something now.

"I think you know that I have had feelings for you for a while," Ginny said. "What you don't know is that they went away, they grew, they changed, as did I. It isn't a schoolgirl crush anymore." She took a breath, which seemed to put to rest in Harry's head the image of a young, preteen Ginny putting her elbow in the butter dish, or worse. Harry would never see that child again. The Ginny that faced him now was different, entirely different, he could tell, and she was onto something else.

"Now, it's..." she seemed to contemplate, liquid brown eyes gazing into his perplexed greens, "more intentional. You're a good man, Harry. You bring out the best in others. The way we played tonight at Quidditch... sure, that was us, but your captaining really set a healthy work ethic and mindset that we played to. And last year..." she thought for a moment, "last year you made Hogwarts tolerable for all of us in the D.A. You give and give and give of your time, Harry, and you think we don't see or know what it costs you."

Harry wasn't sure where Ginny was going with this. What did it cost him to run the D.A. with Hermione? He could think of no alternative, given the circumstances that had occurred with Dolores Umbridge running the school.

Ginny and Harry had passed the statue of the witch. The open door to the classroom was now in front of them. Ginny gazed into Harry's eyes, and walked towards him facing him head on.

"I like you now because you are every bit the good person that anyone can guess. And you deserve to be happy. And I believe I can make you happy."

Ginny's face was less than a foot from his. Harry could feel her breath on him like a breeze as she talked at him.

"And if you're nervous about my prior experience, I understand. That's fine. But there's an experience for me that I don't have already, that I can't have from any of the other guys at Hogwarts, Harry." This time she grinned as if delighting in the mystery of her statement.

Harry's eyes widened upon listening to her words. His eyes were mere inches from hers. His lips, inches from hers as well. "What?" he asked.

"You'll be my first," she said, her lips pressing against his so that few words left could be formed and audible, "my first Parselmouth."

Pushing him into the room with a forceful kiss, Harry completely and blissfully was swept up in Ginny's arms and their robes quickly tangled. Harry was sure he would trip and fall backwards momentarily and equally sure that he absolutely did not care in the slightest.

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2 of 7 planned chapters

3.

The morning sun through the tower window in the girls' dormitory had a way of finding Ginny Weasley even on the days she didn't want it to. Her four-poster bed was positioned along the western wall of the rounded dormitory, and thus was directly across from the window which caught the sunrise. It was for this reason that the other girls refused to swap with Ginny over the years, and she had long gotten used to the nuisance of having bright, white hot sunlight on her face as early as 5:30am depending on the season. Today, it was probably closer to 7 before the curtains she had bewitched to stay undrawn failed her, and her eyes fluttered open in bed.

She had only returned to her dormitory roughly 4 hours ago, after what had seemed like an eternity in that old unused classroom. With Harry.

A grin came to her then. Harry James Potter, the Boy Who Lived, had kissed her. And she kissed him back. In fact, they had done a whole lot of kissing... stopping only when exhaustion and dehydration impeded their desire. Once Harry got over his hesitation, he turned out to be a natural kisser. He wasn't sloppy or careless, and she had shown him the way she liked being kissed and he had picked up on it soon enough.

Ginny took a moment replaying in her mind some of the highlights of the previous evening... tender moments between her and him that only the two of them would ever know. Then, she grabbed her wand off the bedside table, closed the curtains with a casual flick, and turned over to spend more of this Sunday morning unconscious.

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At 10am, with an empty stomach and a full bladder, Ginny reluctantly dressed and exited the dormitory for the bathroom. Not much was happening in the Common Room. The house-elves had already done quite a good job of cleaning up from the celebrations of Gryffindor's Quidditch Cup victory, and the students who were awake seemed preoccupied in conversation with one another.

Ten minutes later, The Great Hall doors opened before her and Ginny walked in cursing her nemesis the Sun, who now shone brightly from the rafters down upon the House tables. They were probably 1/3 occupied, which made it easy to see that Harry was not in his usual spot, nor

Ron, beside Hermione. But she was there, poring over the morning's Prophet and a bowl of oatmeal.

Hermione seemed to spot Ginny coming and put down the newspaper right before Ginny threw her legs over the bench to sit down, and seemed very cheerful at first glance. Ginny couldn't help feeling cheerful herself.

"Seen Harry?" Ginny asked, suppressing a grin.

"He and Ron are up, they ate very little and then went for a walk on the grounds," Hermione replied, with a significant look at Ginny, who replied, simply "Oh."

Having grabbed some toast and sausage, Ginny reached for the butter and knife and began spreading it across the toast, avoiding eye contact with her friend.

"Well?" Hermione asked inquiringly, though without so much as any further detail as to what she was asking. Ginny knew, of course.

"Well what?" Ginny said, though her face betrayed another grin and her lips, poised around a piece of toast as she sank her teeth into it, curved into a smile.

This time Hermione smiled, too and the two of them shared a laugh. After a moment, Hermione repeated, "well... last night, we all saw..."

Ginny, still with some toast in her mouth, made a great showing of surprise and bewilderment when she said, animatedly, "it turns out that Harry fancies me!" And Hermione, for her part, laughed again at the news.

"I knew it!!!" Hermione said. "Oh, I've known it all year. He's really been... well, it's been awful not being able to tell you!" And then her hand rested on Ginny's which was holding a fork. "Your night... did you..."

"We kissed," Ginny admitted freely, "a lot. I took him, we just... we went down to a classroom for privacy. The... the whole of Gryffindor need not see that, you know? Too distracting."

Hermione nodded, knowingly. "You played really well yesterday, Ginny. You should be quite proud of yourself... in addition to, you know, for what happened later."

This comment reminded Ginny of the last time she and Hermione had talked about Quidditch. She put down the toast.

"Hermione, listen. I need to apologise to you. What I said last week, about -"

"Oh, don't," Hermione insisted, "you're all right. I... I may have been too hard on Harry about that stupid Prince of his..."

"But really, I mean... I am glad that we managed to beat Ravenclaw without Harry but even if we hadn't, what I said to you was wrong." Ginny squeezed Hermione's hand and Hermione closed her eyes a bit in acceptance.

"Thank you," she said, then took her hand to spoon some more oatmeal. "It really was a tremendous game, last night."

Ginny again allowed herself to remember how last night had ended, with her trampling Harry to the floor and kissing him fiercely again, and again.

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