

Even If I Was

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Even If I Was

by [nairwal](#)

Summary

Ilya somehow unstraps Shane's helmet with one hand, pulling it off and doing the same with his own. Then, he grins, sharp and wolfish and handsome.

“Scott Hunter has nothing on this,” He says, and surges forward.

Notes

See the end of the work for [notes](#)

In mid-March, in support of Scott Hunter, the MLH introduce what they call the *Be Brave* campaign. They say it's long-overdue; that hockey should have opened its arms wider to queer people—and players—much earlier.

In all honesty, all Shane sees is a league giving their players the option to use rainbow stick tape. It's really, *honestly*, nothing. But that doesn't stop a select few from rallying against it. Shane sees it without meaning to. The headlines, the tweets, the general public outcry that surprises even him. It's definitely not the majority but sometimes it feels like it.

It's enough to prevent him reaching for the tape. For saying anything to the press. For doing anything, anything at all. Shane thinks he's quiet enough about it to be overlooked but it seems to do the opposite. Instead, it seems that a spotlight lands on him. The questions begin to spring up in post-game interviews. Headlines start to apply pressure. *Just what is the Montreal captain doing to show support for the captain of the New York Admirals. Is silence violence when it comes to queer hockey players?* And so on.

Shane doesn't know what to do. He says as much to Ilya.

"What do you want to do? You already give nice, friendly answers for the interview." Ilya shrugs, gestures with his hand. "Shane Hollander cannot change the world."

"Well, no, but people seem to think I can. That I should."

Ilya speaks through a mouthful of cereal. "People are assholes."

Shane huffs a laugh. He stretches out on the sofa, hands behind his head, socked feet rubbing together. "Yeah, I know."

His attention drifts for a moment, deep in thought. The TV is on but muted, a local news channel talking about what Shane can only presume is the weather. He can't help but feel—*wrong* about it all. About being purposely quiet, abiding by his media training, offering nothing but a bland smile and empty words.

"You think too hard, your head will blow up," Ilya murmurs as he clambers onto the couch, a hand finding Shane's hair and resting there. "Bits of you everywhere."

The corner of Shane's mouth curls up. "Ew."

"True, though." A tug on his hair, gentle enough. "What you want?"

To not feel spineless, Shane thinks. To not feel like he's doing something wrong by protecting himself, and Ilya.

"A kiss," is what he says instead.

A few weeks later, Montreal plays New York. The crowd is rowdy, the players amped up. Ilya had texted before the game, a string of cyrillic that Shane had to use Google to translate, which meant both good luck and something about blowing a kiss at the cameras for him to watch from Boston. Shane would not be doing that.

What he does do is spend the first two periods on his A-game. The cheers are loud and echoing in the arena, the hissing of the skates and the puck against sticks is comfortingly familiar.

What isn't is the commotion that comes from two players on the ice. It starts as Shane passes to Hayden, and as Hayden gets body checked by an Admiral. It just so happens to be Scott Hunter who delivers the tackle, and though it wasn't illegal or particularly rough, one of Shane's own men skates up to him, wrangling his gloves off and throwing a sucker punch. From there, it gets kind of wild.

There are things being said, shouted, that Shane can hear. Words that have no place, not on the ice, not anywhere. And they're being directed to Scott, whose own gloves have been thrown in defence, whose face is contorted as he grits his teeth, dodges a fist, throws one himself.

It takes Shane a second but eventually he pushes his feet forward and grabs his player—Baldwin—by the scruff of his jersey, bypassing the refs, and pulls him from Scott.

“What the *fuck* are you doing, Baldwin?” Shane snarls, ignoring the jeers from the crowd, the other brawl going on to his side, the refs circling them. “What’s your fucking problem, huh?”

Baldwin makes to pull away from Shane, but can't dislodge his grip. “Get off of me, Hollander! Let me teach this guy a lesson!”

“For what? A legal check? Get yourself together!”

With a snort, Baldwin pushes at Shane roughly. “What, you like him, Hollander?” He sneers. “Sticking up for your own kind? Should've known you'd be a fag, too—”

And Shane pulls his hand back only to aim it directly at his teammate's chin, a fury within him that seems to escape from beneath his ribs, from within his lungs. His knuckles connect, glove on skin. He throws another two before Baldwin's skates slide oddly and then he's on the ice, Shane standing over him, chest heaving; the refs are shouting something at Shane, but he can't make it out over the blood rushing in his ears and the fans screaming all around them, hands slapping against the plexiglass.

He allows himself to be guided to the penalty box alongside Hayden, who is holding a towel to his bloody nose. Shane doesn't meet his eyes and tries his best to breathe deeply in and out.

“What happened there?” Hayden asks him, sotto voce as best he can. He presses his shoulder into Shane’s. “Baldwin say something to you?”

Shane shakes his head. Listens as his 5-minute major is announced over the speaker. Baldwin isn’t sent to the box, but instead ejected. He gestures wildly on the ice, yelling something at the referee, and Shane clenches his jaw. Even seeing him being escorted off the ice doesn’t cool him down. Nor does seeing Scott in the other penalty box, a split lip and rumpled jersey. Still whole and not looking entirely too worse for wear.

The fans eventually calm themselves, and when Shane and Hayden are freed from their boxes, Hayden lays a hand on Shane’s shoulder.

“I’ve got your back, Captain.”

They win the game in the end. It doesn’t really feel like it.



Ilya calls him almost as soon as he gets home.

“What the fuck was *that*?” He asks, incredulous.

Shane drops his keys on the table and heads straight for the kitchen, opening the fridge for a smoothie. “Baldwin. He’s a fucking asshole.”

“I guessed that, otherwise you wouldn’t have punched him. What happened?”

Shane takes a gulp of his smoothie. Closes his eyes. Breathes out. “He was shouting things at him. Horrible fucking things. To Hunter, you know. He was just looking for an excuse to hit him, I think. And I thought—I need to stop him. As captain, I have to control my own guy. And then I pull him away and he—he calls *me* a—”

“That fucker,” Ilya interrupts, catching on. “That fuck.”

“I know. I know, and he was ejected, but I’ll have to handle it before the next game. I managed to escape the post-game interview but I fought one of my *own* guys, Ilya, and I shouldn’t have but I *did*.”

“Who says you didn’t have to? I say you did the right thing. Fuck Baldwin. He’s a shit player; doesn’t even have an assist this season. Transfer imminent. To shithole team at bottom of the league.”

Shane smiles, he can’t help it. Even with this issue at hand and the *talk* with the coach that surely awaits him tomorrow and the unopened texts from his mom that he can’t quite bring

himself to read yet.

“If all’s right in the world, yes, maybe. We’ll see what happens. Coach will probably give me an earful, but if Baldwin keeps his mouth shut we shouldn’t have any more issues. I just worry that... I don’t know.” Shane grabs a sleeve of crackers and meanders over to the couch. He drops down, groaning as he gets comfortable. “I worry.”

Ilya hums in understanding. “I know that.”

“How was your day?”

“Not as crazy as yours. I train, I eat good food, I watch you play. You forgot to blow kiss to camera but you remember to fight your own teammate? You hurt me.”

“Shut up,” Shane laughs.



The following day, coach tells him not to fight one of his own men again and Shane agrees. He doesn't apologise, however. And that seems to be enough.

For the *press*, however, during the next pre-game interview, Shane’s PR answer—

“It happened in the heat of the moment, you know, with the adrenaline, and it won’t happen again. Baldwin and I are teammates, and I’m his captain. It won’t reflect in our performance today.”

—isn’t enough.

“But what caused the fight? Are there tensions among the Metros that fans should be aware of?” One journalist asks him. Shane thinks she works for an online tabloid but can’t be sure.

“Like I said, no one should be concerned with how we play. We won against New York. We’ll win today against Atlanta.”

A different reporter jumps in. “Mr. Hollander, can you confirm that you fought Gregory Baldwin in response to his actions against Scott Hunter? And was his attack motivated by Hunter’s recent public statement?”

Shane blinks. He’s certain no one outside of the players knew what was said on the ice that night. It was far too loud for anyone off the rink to make anything out. It’s probably a bluff. But Shane freezes, for a moment. Perhaps a moment too long. The reporter is already opening his mouth again, eyes bright, a shark smelling blood.

“So it *did* concern Hunter? Would you care to elaborate? Are the Montreal Metros working with the MLH on their *Be Brave* campaign? And if so, is Baldwin in opposition?”

“Alright, enough questions for today, thank you, thank you,” The coach interrupts immediately, waving away the microphones and pushing at Shane’s shoulder, guiding him into the locker room and away from the flashing of cameras, the questions that are still being thrown his way.

Once there, among the bustle of his team, Shane lets his shoulders drop. Coach gives him a look.

“Don’t let them get to you. You know by now how they are.”

Shane nods. Shakes it off. “Yeah, I know. Thanks, coach.”

“Get yourself together, captain.” And he’s away again.

Hayden bumps into Shane’s side, friendly and smiling. “Hey. Interview not go well?”

Shane fiddles with his jersey where it's hung up. “No, I think—it was probably fine.”

“Was it about Greg?” Hayden presses.

Shane glances over to the other side of the locker room, sees Baldwin chatting animatedly with another of their players. He seems to be in a good mood despite his ejection yesterday.

“Yeah.” Shane looks at Hayden. “Just—yeah. The fight. It’s fine, though. I know how to handle the reporters.”

As he pulls his jersey over his head and reaches for his socks, Hayden sits down beside Shane.

“Like I said... I’m here if you need to talk. You’re my friend, Shane.”

Shane smiles, genuine. Hayden has always been a good man. Kind to Shane when he needed it. “Thanks. You too.”



The next time Shane and Ilya meet, in Boston, Shane can’t help but think—*what if?* What if he were to voice his support for the queer community? What if he were to use the rainbow tape, wear the rainbow jersey? What if he were to come out and just say it? *What if, what if.*

Ilya listens to Shane as he rambles, as the ideas fly into his head and out of his mouth. His face stays the same, mostly, though he begins chewing on his bottom lip when Shane mentions coming out publicly.

“We have a plan, no?” Ilya asks eventually, when Shane runs out of steam and looks over at him across the dining table. Their dinner plates are long cleared between them. “Wait until hockey is over for us. Retirement; then we make a statement. We said this to Yuna.”

Shane nods slowly. “Yeah, I know. I just feel like... I need to do *something*. And—yes, I *know* I can’t save the world or whatever. I don’t want to. But a part of me feels like I’m not doing enough. For people like me, like you. For people like Scott Hunter.”

“I think...” Ilya reaches a hand across the table, fingers interlocking with Shane’s. “You are stressed. Ah, ah, hear me out,” He insists when Shane begins to protest. “You are stressed out and thinking about all of this. It seems like the end of world. Now is not the right time to make a rash decision. Think about it, yes, but do nothing yet. Whatever you want to do; I will do with you.”

Shane swallows, eyes stinging. “You will? Even though it’s—*could be*—sooner than we said it would be?”

Ilya releases Shane’s hand, and comes around the table. Drops onto his lap and kisses his head. He exhales against his hair and Shane holds him tighter. Ilya takes a moment just to breathe. When he speaks, his voice is small but firm.

“I think so, yes. I would like to. I know we discussed it before. With your parents. And it would be safer, maybe, to wait. Or—not *safer*. Easier. But I am with you. We are partners.” He stops to kiss Shane, breathing into him. “If you want to do this, we both do it. I trust you. I love you.”

Shane nods against Ilya’s skin.



The first time out on the ice with the pride tape wrapped around his hockey stick and the number on his jersey a brightly striped rainbow, Shane feels nauseous to the point of dizziness.

It has only been two weeks since his chat with Ilya and the urge to do *something* only grew with each day he did *nothing*. Ilya agreed to use the same tape and have his own jersey altered for his next game. This doesn't make Shane feel any less like a spotlight isn't directly overhead.

JJ slides up to him with a brow raised behind the visor of his helmet. “You good?”

Shane just nods and waves him off. “Yeah. Dizzy is all. I’ll be alright.”

“If you say so. Try not to get into any fights this game then, eh?”

“Ha ha,” Shane says, rolling his eyes.

The game begins with a flurry of energy from both teams. But the entire time, his mind is half focused on the image he makes. The colours he’s showing off. And he chose to do it. He told Ilya he would do it. He told his *mom* he would do it. He’s proud that he did but he’s *scared*.

He scores twice, gets one assist, laughs and celebrates with his team, but the feeling doesn’t entirely leave him. It lingers even after their win and as he is being escorted to his post-game interview. The sea of faces, microphones, and cameras that greet him turn his stomach. He smiles at them plainly. He cannot wait to get home.

“Shane! Good game today.”

“Thank you,” He says as he sits at the table. Folds his hands together tightly.

“Our publication is interested in your efforts to participate in the *Be Brave* campaign tonight...” The same journalist continues, glancing down at their phone screen for a moment. Shane readies himself, smile stuck on his face. “Your stick, the jersey. Is this your way of showing support for Scott Hunter?”

Shane clears his throat, adjusts the microphone in front of him. “I’m, uh, showing support for the entire community, you know. That includes Scott, of course.”

“Are you concerned about the response to this?”

“The response?” Shane frowns, momentarily lost. “I’m aware there has been some backlash but—it’s just a show of support, a gesture. If anyone has a problem with it I think they should take a moment and reflect on why they have such a problem with queer people.”

“Thank you, Shane. That’s all.”

He expels a breath through his nose, nods at another journalist who smiles politely and jumps right in with his own follow-up question.

“Does this mean that you, yourself, identify with Scott Hunter?”

Shane can only stare. There’s a couple of murmurs around the room.

“Sorry?”

The journalist continues to smile. Shane isn’t sure if he’s imagining the slight edge to it or not.

“Are you coming out as gay, Mr. Hollander?”

Flashes go off, blindingly bright.

“What kind of question is that? You can't just—*ask* that kind of thing!” Shane exclaims, wide-eyed, gesturing out to the journalist. Most of the others in the room are leaning forward in their seats, fingers tapping away on phone screens, pens scribbling furiously on notepads.

“Even if I am—you really shouldn't infer something based on a show of allyship. I'm afraid this is where the questions end. Thanks.”

He practically bolts from the room, questions continuing to be shouted at his back, but the blood is rushing through him. He's both horrified and mortified. Second-guessing his response. Was he too obvious? All he did was finally dip his toes into showing support for the campaign. Has he fallen into the deep end already?

Even if I am, he had said. To a room full of journalists and in front of a live video feed. That's pretty cut and dry.

“Fuck, fuck, *fuck*.”

His fingers itch to reach for his phone and call Ilya, but Shane knows he's training right now. He can't bother him. The rest of his team have already showered, changed and left the arena to go home. The locker room is empty. All Shane can hear is his own breath as it shudders out of him. All he can feel is the heaving of his chest, the weakness in his knees.

He sits down heavily on the bench. Lets his head fall forward into his open, waiting hands. It was so simple: declare support for the community. Keep it vague but clear enough. And instead Shane had practically blurted that he was part of it all. Fuck.

He sits there for what feels like forever until his heart slows down. Until the building panic simmers a little. Until the ping-ping-pinging of notifications on his phone encourages him to shower and make his way home without glancing at it even once.



He wakes up with a jolt from an impromptu nap hours later, when the sun has set and the dark leaves him feeling disoriented. He has drooled on his pillow. He's still fully clothed and wondering why he's suddenly awake.

His phone rings. Again, it seems. The screen is full of notifications of all kinds. Shane swallows thickly. The screen says *Ilya*. No longer Lily, not for a few months now. Shane answers the call.

“Hello?”

Ilya exhales on the other side. “Jesus, Shane. I begin to think you are running away into the Canadian wilderness by now.”

Shane rubs at his eyes, flicks on his bedside lamp. Floods everything in yellow-orange light. “Sorry, I got home and immediately fell asleep. I haven’t read anything yet. Is it—bad?”

Ilya hums. There’s the sound of a television behind him, not too loud, that seems to be commentary. Ilya is probably watching game highlights.

“Not bad,” Ilya reassures him. “Not what you planned, though.”

“No,” Shane closes his eyes and leans back against his pillows. “I’m so stupid. I let them trip me up. Did you watch the interview?”

“Yes. The reporter was wrong to ask you that. I don’t blame you for saying what you did. It’s okay, Shane.”

“I miss you.”

“I miss you too. Maybe wait until tomorrow before you check your phone, yes?”

Shane huffs through his nose. “Yeah. I won’t look at anything. I’ll handle it tomorrow.”

“Want to FaceTime?”

Shane fixes his hair. “Obviously.”



The next day arrives full of clear skies and sunshine. It’s starting to get warmer, in April, and Shane wakes up feeling lighter. Despite everything, his chat with Ilya last night has helped him feel better. It’d been late when they’d finally hung up.

After a cool shower and a simple breakfast, Shane finally picks up his phone and wades through the slurry of notifications. Instagram, Twitter, his email, texts, missed phone calls. He immediately checks the messages from his mom.

Mom

14:34

Honey, I saw what happened. Call me.

14:50

Shane?

18:15

Call me whenever you can. Take your time. We love you!

>> Hey, mom. I'm good. Just had to take a breather. I'll call you later. Love you too. <<

There's a couple more texts that he reads but doesn't respond to, at least not yet:

Hayden Pike

19:00

Hey buddy, always here for you! I'll see you at training on Thursday, right? Jackie says you'll have to have dinner with us then.

19:02

Love ya. So much. :)

JJ Dagenais

19:38

shane, you oughta file a complaint with HR about those reporters. for real man 🙄 you can call whenever you need to. see you at practice. wanna get lunch or something??

Rose Landry

21:20

Baby!!! I've been hearing about you coming out, I didn't know you were planning on doing it! Congrats!

22:05

Hi. I just watched the clip. I'm sorry, I heard the news and thought it was a real statement from you. Love you, always here for you!! ❤️

His emails are largely corporate, and Shane opts to ignore them for now. His Instagram profile has somehow amassed a whole bunch of new followers, comments, and hearts. Twitter is a warzone at the best of times, and the clip of him is already viral. To top it all off, there's a trending hashtag. *#EvenIfIWas*

"Jesus fucking God," Shane grumbles and places his phone down.

This wasn't the plan. He wanted to do it slowly, over time. To say it with his own words. Not to be—pushed into saying something incriminating by a reporter with no concept of boundaries or decorum. Despite feeling like everything was doomed yesterday, and feeling much better today, he still feels cheated.

Shane startles when his phone rings. He answers without looking, expecting his mom or Ilya. Instead...

"Hey. Shane? It's Scott Hunter. This *is* Shane, right?"

Shane swallows. "Uh, yeah. Yeah, what's up, man?"

"I got your number from Pike, I hope that's not a problem. I just—I can't remember the next time we play against one another. I didn't want to wait until then to talk to you. I know you probably don't—want to hear it. But I have to say, first of all, thank you for what you said in the interview, about me. About showing support." Scott clears his throat, adjusts the phone. "And I'm sorry about that shitty reporter that put you on the spot. Are you... I mean, do you have a statement prepared?"

Shane stares into the middle distance. "A statement? Well. I mean, my mom, she handles that side of things. She always has. We—had a kind of plan. So yeah. But I haven't called her yet. I guess I should do that and sort it all out. I just... needed..."

"A moment? I get that. Take as much time as you need. I'm sure the MLH will support you the whole way. They've been surprisingly helpful with me, you know?"

Shane smiles to himself. "Yeah. I'm glad."

"Thanks. And, look. If you need support or anything? I'm here. I guess everyone you know has pretty much bombarded you with the same words, but I mean it. Anyway, I'll let you call your mom and handle the statement. Good luck."

“Thanks, Scott. I really do appreciate it.”

“See you.”

With that, Shane sets out to provide a statement for the press. But first he has to call his mom. And Ilya.



Shane and Ilya agree that a joint statement is the way to go. They'd planned for something like it, albeit years and years from now, but Ilya refuses to let Shane do it on his own. So, Yuna sits them down and helps them formulate something pleasant and friendly, something palatable but true. It doesn't take too long, considering, but by the end of it Shane feels exhausted.

“I could sleep for a week.”

Ilya laughs softly, pressing a kiss to Shane's temple. “Me too. Yuna also, I think; she did most of the work.”

Shane's mom smiles at Ilya, something she's been doing far more of recently. She looks at Ilya with a softness she usually only reserves for Shane. It's nice.

“I think both of you boys deserve a good rest. Once this statement is out there, hopefully you'll feel less like you have something to burden you.” She opens her arms at them both for a cuddle. They don't hesitate, and then the three of them are doing some kind of weird group huddle. This, too, is kind of nice.

Yuna squeezes them one last time and pulls back.

“So. The plan: release the statement next Monday, lay low until your next game, which is Montreal versus Boston, on Wednesday, and do a joint post-game interview. It's all been organised. After that, you can distance yourself as much or as little from the press as you please.”

Ilya nods, looking pleased as punch and not at all as scared as Shane feels.

“Thank you for your help,” He says to Yuna. To Shane, he just smiles wider. “We will be alright. We will be *good*.”

Shane can't help but believe him.



Major Hockey League

Press Release | May 4, 2017

Shane Hollander of the Montreal Metros and Ilya Rozanov of the Boston Raiders have decided to release a joint statement declaring they are gay and bisexual, respectively, and in a committed relationship.

This decision was motivated by recent events wherein Shane was pressured by a member of the press to disclose his sexuality. This statement has been made on their own terms to reclaim their autonomy over their personal lives and prevent any speculation.

They hope that their fans and the press at large respect their decision to come out at this time. They appreciate the support they have received thus far and ask that their privacy be respected going forward.



The Metros versus Raiders game is electric before they even make it out of their locker rooms. Shane is met with a fierce attack of hugs, slaps on the back, and supportive words by his teammates. With some ribbing about Shane's other half being a *Raider* of all things.

Hayden gushes over Shane, promising to have him and Ilya over for a celebratory dinner some time. That he can't wait to have a chat with Rozanov in a friendlier setting. JJ is ecstatic for him and promises to punch anyone who has a problem with him—which, you know. Is kinda nice, in a way. Olsson and Taylor, even though they're two quiet and private guys, each offer their sincere congratulations.

The only one who doesn't speak to Shane is Baldwin. It isn't surprising. But Ilya was right, he's going to get traded. Shane won't miss him whatsoever.

As both teams get out onto the ice, the arena is roaring to the point of being ear-splitting. The adrenaline is already rushing through Shane. His eyes peeled for Ilya like it's their only purpose.

And he spots him, laughing with a couple of his teammates in the neutral zone. But like he feels Shane's eyes on him, he glances over. Catches Shane's gaze and smiles that beautiful smile, face crinkling behind his visor. Shane smiles back, practically beams.

The face-off begins. And it just so happens to be Shane and Ilya that are sent to the centre circle. They're already laughing as they meet, sticks outstretched. It reminds Shane so much of their face-off ad campaign.

"Don't go easy on me, Hollander," Ilya grins.

Shane scoffs. "Never."

He doesn't. But the Raiders still win. Even as they celebrate on the ice and their fans go wild in the stands, Shane can't wipe the smile from his face.

"Hey you oughta look less happy about that loss, captain!" Hayden jokes, skating up to him.

"Believe me, I wish we would've won. We all tried our best. I'm just... happy."

"I don't doubt it." Hayden brings their helmeted heads together. It's a sweet gesture. Shane feels light with the support from his friends and family.

"Trying to steal my man, Pike?" Comes a very familiar voice.

Shane laughs as Hayden backs away, hands held up in surrender. "Nah, just showing my love." He holds his gloved hand out for a fist bump. Gets one in return.

"See ya," Hayden says with a wink, and escapes the rink.

Shane finds himself moving closer to Ilya without realising, their bulky gear and hockey sticks knocking against each other.

"Good game."

Ilya shrugs. "For *me*, yes. For you? Not so much."

"Hey, fuck you," Shane laughs, shaking his head and trying not to swallow his tongue when Ilya moves even closer. A hand comes to rest at the nape of his neck, the other at his waist. Ilya somehow unstraps Shane's helmet with one hand, pulling it off and doing the same with his own. Then, he grins, sharp and wolfish and handsome.

"Scott Hunter has *nothing* on this," He says, and surges forward.

They meet in the middle for a kiss that's as explosive as it is affectionate. The cheers around them seem to triple in volume. But it fades as Shane continues to press into his boyfriend, as Ilya continues to lick into his mouth and then pull away as their smiles make it impossible to keep going on.

"Love you." Ilya pecks his forehead, his cheeks. Holds his head so gently in his big hands. Eyes only for Shane. "Love you."

“I love you too. Now let's go get this interview over and done with. I want to go home.”

“With me?”

“With you. Always.”

End Notes

i don't even like this but i needed to write something lol. hoping to write more in 2026!!!!

also i know that ilya's english is good but sometimes it's cute to have him mess words/grammar. sue meeeee

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