HE woman standing by the window now is more than 50. A rather tall woman is she. Now lanky, now haggard. Her enervated look is the index of long suffering. and as she implores for alms, her lower lip. thick and blackened, hangs out presently filling Rabbani's mind with sheer contempt. She clutches at the bars of the window with a small hard grip, while her other hand holds her alms-bowl tightly against her bosom.

Rabbani has known this woman called Ayesha since his childhood.

Well, twenty or twenty-five years back, no occasion in Rabbani's father's house was celebrated without Ayesha's dance. She was the most sought-after amateur performer in the area. That is, just before she got caught pregnant. His father, though vastly knowledgeable about human lapses, was furious, and used an oil-soaked lithe cane twice on her back to extract the secret. It did not work, and Rabbani still remembers her treading across the grassy yard to the gate. As time wore on, however. Ayesha has reestablished the connection and makes her round to Rabbani's place over the weekend.

But today's morning is different. Rabbani's face tells you that something is bothering him. Yes, a matter in the bank for which he works much perturbs him, and as no wink of sleep came to him last night, the thought of suicide possessed and almost overpowered him. This morning, of all things, he has chosen to check his son's homework.

His son, a boy of 13, big and flabby, with very little grey matter in the head, means a complete drudgery to his father. The father works with the tenacity of a bull to instill some kind of IQ into the son. On the other hand, the son has the arcane genius to press just that one key which will trigger the father's anger. This father and his son at the same time are strangely tuned up in their negatives.

Today, however, everything is going on properly, though lack of sleep the night before soon fatigues Rabbani. Still he is not in a relenting smood. His son to him is a piece of wood or a rock whom he believes, if only he sticks to it, he will be able to give a desired shape. He knows that he is trying to impose a pattern of expectation on his son which he might not readily fulfil. He goes on hoping, and is much disappointed that his son is not showing promise. Besides, the affair at the bank is worrying

him. His transactions have been spotless; though over the recent years, habit or whatever you call it, he preferred to be lazy about keeping the accounts. As the time to close the ledger has drawn near, Rabbani, to his great grief, has discovered that a great amount has seeped through without any record, and he cannot even tell how! Well, occasionally he went to the officers' club that's true — he gambled at cards — yes! He also made big purchases on whims! How absolutely everything is on the rack now!

Now his restlessness doubles as Ayesha's hunger-laid face appears outside the window. But. Ayesha cannot be asked to go away. He peers at her over his spectacles and suddenly his face twitches, his muscles harden because Ayesha is crying: silent tear-drops are rolling down her cheeks.

He asks in desperation: "What happened? Why're you crying?"

Ayesha's voice is wobbling as she tries to talk through her sobs. "You see ... son... did I ever ask you for alms .. did I ever eat here without being asked .. now .. now ... why I do it, you're like my own son, you'll understand. The other day they beat me up calling me a thief. Say, can I steal, can I go down so low ... oh ... oh .. you'll only understand..." Then Ayesha breaks into more sobs.

Rabbani looks helpless against the enormity of the cause. He labours to produce some words of comfort, but Ayesha continues: "I feel

NVOLVED in breakthrou-

poetry of Sylvia Plath not

only exposes its specifically

decadent forebears, but sugg-

ests certain directions in

modern art. Urges for the

perfection of art, and motifs

related to the death of life

the beginning. Her particular

dybbuk could have been her

father, a biology professor, who

died when she was only eight.

And it may or may not have

been significant that she was

born in the crucial year of the

Great Depression, 1932, on

October 27, in Boston

Memorial Hospital. The emo-

tional climate of the country

was one of despondency, be-

wilderment, and despair, not

an art". And the perfection of

art becomes inseparable from

the perfection of life and

death. She is attracted to what

is inhuman and transcendent.

Her first volume The Colossus

metaphorically comes to stand

for her entire creation in life

and art. It is a creation which

is also a ruin. It shows a con-

the polished product of an ex-

tremely clever but almost re-

mal, self-conscious Sylvia

Bound (but alive and well); in

Artel, the demonic, fearlessly

The Colossus was patently

cern almost excessive.

For Sylvia Plath, "dying is

unmixed with rebellion.

were present in her work from

ghs and breakdowns, the,

like crying today. All these years I have been living without a proper meal. You all help me I know. You help me more because I've no children. Yet, I cry because you all help me from outside. You all sort of help me as a form of duty, and I feel so lonely ... O, God merciful, why he is not finishing this useless body!"

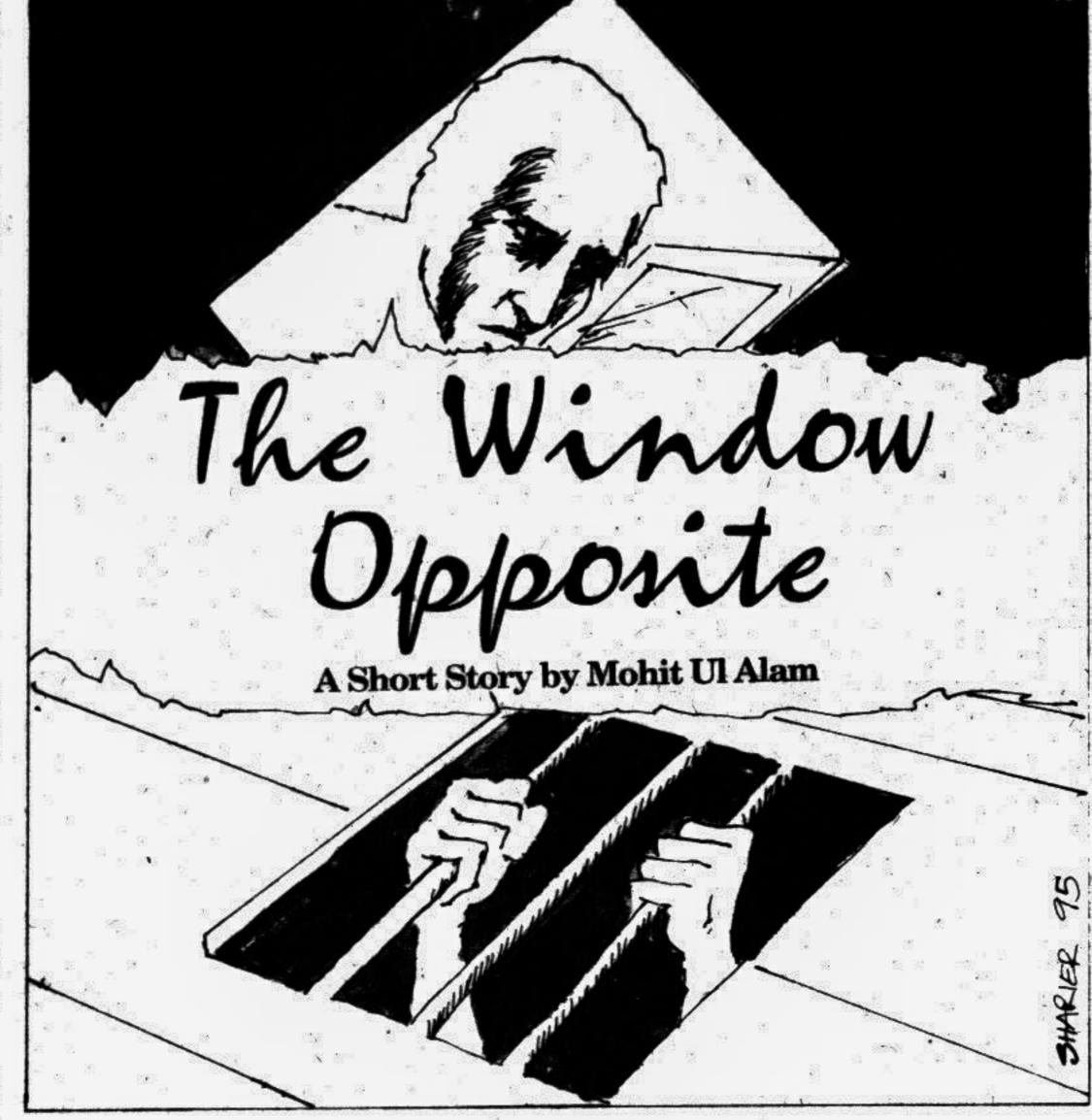
Rabbani tries to console her. "Reality is hard you know... everybody has complaints. " In a flux of emotion. he asks, "Doesn't Rahila's son take care of you?"

"He ... ai .. he doesn't. Why, he have eight daughters, you know."

dance anymore in public." "No, sister, you must dance today," Itu persists. Rabbani finds it difficult to realise as to when they have both become so intimate!

warmly takes itu in her arms. "Brother, i don't

The child swells with joy as Ayesha reorganises her sari for the dance. The boys' mother comes out of the house. She and the two sons, and the maid servant and the dog of the house, all stand up around Ayesha allowing her a small circular arena to dance. Rabbani does not leave his chair though. Ayesha dances.



"What about Mohammad Ali, Rabiza's brother?"

"Ai, ai, you know that he drinks in season and out of season. His wife also left him, you know."

Rabbani becomes inquisitive. "How exactly are you related to Khairunnessa?" "She and my mother were married to the same man. She is my stepmother. But, how can I tell you ... she can hardly move now. Pains; you know. O what a suffering all this living is to her!"

Something spectacular happens now Rabbani's wife is back from school with their younger son, Itu. She teaches at a kindergarten, where Itu also is a student. Itu is always in ill-health, and always coughing, a rheumatic child as he is. He is otherwise playful, when his larynx is free, and seeing Ayesha now he breaks into a welcoming laughter, and pleads, scampering around her, clapping his hands vigorously, "Sister, you dance, you dance!"

One or two cautious steps slowly at first. One or two markers by the hands. She is obviously riding back on a long-forgotten track. Then slowly her hands and feet get more concerted. Nothing seems to have gone amiss all these years as she swerves vigorously at the end of every turn. She is as wholly engrossed as a spinning top. Invisible ripples form around her waist, and then break instantly, and then form again. Sometimes she quickens her steps, sometimes she slows them down depending on the circle she is making. And then the song comes. The voice is croaking. In a minute however much of the congestion is cleared by a small cough. Then her throat opens, full and clear, like a bird's. It is a folk song she has chosen, popularly sung on the eve of the mar-

The bridegroom is at the gate O lovely daughter tell us How will we decorate you O lovely daughter tell us O lovely daughter tell us.

rhythmically mixed up with Ayesha's apparently unconcerned movement. Rabbani gazes at her for a while. Ayesha's eyes now shut, now half-shut, don't care much. Her face half-way lifted, lips tightly closed, but wellprotruded, and her cheeks much drawn inside - all tell of inexplicable miseries, while at the same time a bemused expression has cast a shade over her dark face. Only it is that her health fails her this time. She missteps a few times as she perspires heavily. It is of no avail, Rabbani thinks. What is lost is lost. For them who never saw Ayesha dance before, it is all very okay. Itu is actually trotting all around her. It is not long before Ayesha gets tired, while brimming drops of sweat accumulate on her eyes and lips.

Then Ayesha stops altogether. She breaks into peals of laughter - her

voice thudding noisily against her breast. She draws in a whole segment of air before she speaks out.

"Son," she addresses Rabbani, "It's not like before. Everything's changed. Starvation, has eaten me up .. Ah, .. your father ... yes ... he was my real admirer. He'd always give me ten taka each time I danced."

Rabbani ponders for a moment. He is shocked by the discovery that his father was not as calculative and exacting as he is. What attitude has he had toward Ayesha all these years? It is not the question of not giving occasional help, which he rather ritually does, especially during the two Eids, but Ayesha is treated the same way as are the many who come to his house for succour. Why no special feeling for Ayesha, he wonders! Whatever is left of her - the pith and tooth of it - she can still call it at her beck. In the same strain, Rabbani wonders, why has he so, far looked up to the fact of financing his sons' education as some kind of investment!

Ayesha leaves, but the affairs at the office come to his mind again. An almost crushing feeling destroys whatever mood Ayesha's dance has raised in him. He leaves his chair, takes a short stroll over the yard and enters the kitchen where his wife is now taking preparation for the day's cooking. From the other room, comes the noise as his two sons are at a quarrel again, while his wife is shouting at them from the kitchen equally noisily. Everything looks so normal, so sort of happy. All through his life he has wanted to be unquestionably right. And yet, how could he do a thing which every part of his mind despises so much. His sons are a hundred holes which he has to patch with loads of paper-notes, while his wife to him has been nothing more than his best winter-coat, a woman whose demands he has to continuously fulfil. He feels about himself like a condom that is flushed away after use.

Hopeless and crestfallen, he approaches his wife in the kitchen. "I'll quit my job," he says. The gas-burner is on. It is hot inside the kitchen. His wife is cooking something fast, stirring the broth vigorously, while keeping her face away from the heat. The room smells spicy mixed with a delicious flavour. She obviously hasn't caught his words, and says, in

an unconcerned tone, "What?" Rabbani finds the time to regroup his worlds. Now he says, "Ay, what you say, if I quit the job!"

"Why," her eyes widen in astonishment. Ah, the secret, thinks Rabbani. The burden of the sin of having to keep everything to himself.

"Yes, I'll quit," he firmly says this time. "Whyt" his wife repeats, astonishment receding from and concern appearing on her

'No, this job has turned me into a dishonest man. I don't want nothing of it anymore."

"I don't know yet. But I'll try."

"And, you think you'll change, if you quit the By now, it's jubilant clapping. His mother's Hearing this. Ayesha moves away from the laughter, and the older son's mute smile all get window, puts her alms-bowl on the floor, and Sylvia Plath: Dying as an Art

casual, fiercely candid Sylvia Unbound (but psychoneurotic

Most of her poems centre around suicide, self-hatred and disgust for child-bearing and other bodily functions. So careful, so conscious as to be self-conscious, she con structed The Colossus, out of everything she knew: literary. tradition and her chosen poetic masters, visual art, the vivid, heightened sights and sounds of the natural world. the vast, eerie world of her imagination, and consummately skilled poetic craftsmanship. The metaphors of The Colossus, themselves as distinctively powerful as the whole poems, announce most of the themes that becomes the madness and ecstasy of Ariel. The restrained anger over social abuses ("Night Shift"), the sense of shared guilt in history's ugliness ("The Thin People"), the love-hatred for father ("The Beekeeper's Daughter"), the discomfort of alien body, the fascination with illness and hospitals ("The Stones"), and repeatedly, the drawing toward death, the urge to suicide - all these are

movement is internalized. And

meaning frequently turns eli-

tist. in poems like "Berck-

pellently remote poet who seemed intent upon disguising some hidden self, her own the themes abundantly evident emotional reality. Not that any in The Colossus. of the poems lacked talent. Stasis. Perfection. Death Far from it. The very best of The associations are unmistakthem, such as "Night Shift", able, and they are increasingly, "All the Dead Dears". "The Disobsessively impressed upon us quieting Muses". "The Beein her late work. The full revekeeper's Daughter". "The lation of her agony comes in Stones" and the title poem it-Ariel. The poems are all part of one great confession. Ariel was self were genuine poetic no one-shot love affair with achievements, potent, comdeath. She courted it all her plex, rather formal, brilliantly orchestrated performances life, and won. Beyond the that took full advantage of their beautiful and the ugly which author's rich literary backshe feared in The Colossus ground and penchant for origwould always remain incominal metaphors. What appeared plete, is perfected in such missing from all of them. Ariel poems as "Edge" especially after exposure to the "Confusion", and "Words". In passionate outcries of Ariel. perfecting her art and herself was a distinct personal voice. as woman, she gave herself The intense, surreal confesupto a rehearsal and preparasionalism of the Ariel poems, tion for death in poems like "A as well as their conversational Birthday Present", "Daddy" ease, was eons removed from and "Death & Co." These are the neoclassical rituals empoems that could only conblemed in The Colossus. A clude in death. Dying over and reader excited by Ariel would over in her poems, she eelenot be much encouraged to brated a black mass that lends look back to The Colossus by to her last book the distinction the rather scornful dismissals of sacrament and desecration. of the volume. We have in The As the later poems traffic in Colossus the monolithic, forunfamiliar psychological states. by Shawkat Haider



Plage" and "Fever 1030". there is a sensed loss of an available world. Death is redolent in Plath's moon poems, night poems, and bee poems. As she approaches the moments of vision. Plath is often reticent But she is more often given up to a histrionic exhibition of herself and her wounds, and to a wish to undo herself. She also wrote confessional poetry as in the much praised "Lady Lazarus" about her recurrent suicide attempts. Its opening lines come at once like a driven hammer

I have done it again One year in every ten. I marage it..... Her most famous and notorious "Daddy" poem in Ariel is spoken by the author's evil double, resenting her father's death and consequent loss of love. "Daddy" is a vicious vengeful invective hurled against father, husband, and by implication, all men. Life seemed blackened when she was betrayed by her beloved husband Ted. But the place where Plath explored the psychological double to the fullest was in her autobiographical novel The Bell Jar (1963). These images polarize the attitudes of the heroine toward herself and others. With the writing of The Bell Jar, she exorcised the spectre of suicide, but not the ghost of her father. It was the delight of

those hours she chose to

record, giving her father and herself an additional year of life together. The two other volumes of poems published after her death, Crossing the Water and Winter Trees were actually written during the work of Colossus. Through Crossing the Water Plath's moralized landscapes show that she is capable of writing excellent descriptive poetry, at once less mannered than that of The Colossus and less strident than the hallucinatory lyrics of Artel. The feminine protest against masculine ego. will, and violence, seen in the earlier collections, is first manifest here in "Pheasant", in which she urges the aggressive male to "Let be. Let be". In Plath, man's rage for order is as despicable as his violence. "I am vertical" announces, on the obvious level the poet's deathwish. But buried in the language is protest against the image of woman as seen by the male chauvinist pig:

Nor am I the beauty of a garden bed Attracting my share of Ahs

and spectacularly painted, Unknowing I must soon unpetal.

Plath's use of syllabic count for lines of poetry is quite another thing, neither ironic nor obviously symbolic. Yet the syllabic count is more than a simple mathematical exercise. She wants to make each breath, each syllable, count. Plath's syllabics are probably best understood by way of Dvlan Thomas, who used syllabics more than anyone seems to have realized - and then almost always in his most deathconscious lyrics. For her and for him, syllabics are the slow drip, as unstoppable as the bleeding of a hemophiliac, of words expiring syllable by syllable - breathing out and dy-

Plath's works are noted for

their preoccupation with alienation, death and self-destruction. Her early life was dominated by a drive to excel in writing, and she published her first poem at eight. From 55 to '57, she attended the University of Cambridge on a Fulbright grant. Although she has since become a cult-figure. she is highly regarded by critics for her technical virtuosity and her acuity, passion and honesty. The process and direction in her poems danger ously approach a purity in which analogy and metaphor finally are abolished. Dream deteriorated into reality in Plath's last year. Her art unleashed repressed material that her conscious self could not handle; poetry kept her alive and sane during a time when the forces of daily existence were threatening to overwhelm her frail defences After her split with Ted, after the ruin of her Eden in the summer of 1962, she fought back against the tide of depression with the only method she knew, the method of madness, not clinical madness but the madness of poetry itself, inspiration mated to craft. When she no longer felt this

way near the end of January, 1963, schizophrenic melancholia was transferring her fierce rage against both the world and Ted dangerously inward, against herself, rising her sense of worthlessness. causing severe panie. On the 11th February, when poetry was beyond her, she knew it was time once again to gamble against God. She committed suicide turning on the gas in

Her flerce and brilliant language is all directed at other whom she wishes to overcome. but the giants and colossi of her poetry fall down only to rise again; the body immolates itself only to return to its old. guilt-ridden shape. Her initiatory dramas release her from one state of suffering so that she may endure a new agony, For the briefest moment though, she is set free from the imprisonment of selfhood; and it is this moment that her best poems. Ariel": "Lady Lazarus" and "Courters" celebrate. If she could not sustain her liberation beyond moment she still provides an intense vision of the irreducible, en twined core of life and death.

Birds, Flowers and Children

by Nazim Mahmood

Birds, flowers and children Flowers, children and birds All alike, the selfsame train All are God's chosen wards

Lo! the birds in the sky Rolling about, making fun Like the children trim and shy Like the flowers bloom in the sun

In the garden flowers look Like the children in a school Or like birds in a nook Sipping nectar from a pool

When the children together play Like the birds high above In a bouquet roses say To the mankind a divine love.

Promise

by Helal Kabir Chowdhury

Heaven's child is born To a pleased couple Ecstacy to a bevy of admirers Babe is seen with a feel unknown to all.

Tukku will scale over Belying mudslingers chorus Shall win over foes. Preserve his charms and glory. He is our pride possess. Smile shows latent beauty of a paradise to us. Shower him with affection to the chagrin of Satan.

Bereft of belief and reality That he shall have to live Forever in a sea of treasure Before the final journey to eternity.

Hope

by Gazi Sadeq

I shall come to you, she said. when the sun is setting... Caress your brow, make you sleep... and slowly, slowly slip away.

When sleep evades you, and you toss in your lonely bed... I shall come to you like the wind... hiding from everybody... Caress your brow, make you sleep... and slowly, slowly slip away...

The sun has set... still I await!

Design with a Human Face

Continued from page 10 waiting for the imminent appearance of the individual house, sold by correspondence, that he designed for

the 3 Suisses. In such diversified and considerable work, one may wonder what coherence and what constants can be found, all the more as, when he is questioned. Philippe Starck always strongly asserts his mistrust of globalising theories, of the usual splitting-up into concepts (for instance: modernism/post-modernism) and of what is written in general. In fact, he prefers the spoken word. He has an art for finding the right expressions. He strings them along during the countless interviews that he

general press, giving us the sparse keys to decipher his work. Out of all his key-words, there are six major ones: - the word "Service+" takes

up and extends the concept of functionalism. Philippe Starck explains, "pleasure, semantics, poetry, humour and magic must be considered as functions in the same way as other more utilitarian ones"

- the term "minimum object" explains Starck's taste for simplicity and economy which he opposes to the minimalism of the modern movement of the 20s. He replaces the famous expression by the German architect Mies Van Der Rohe "Less is more" by "Doing more with less".

— another key-concept, that of "anonymity +" reminds the designer of the necessity to disappear, to efface himself behind his objects and to let them find their autonomy on their own

- "symbolism and scenarios" is perhaps the most important category to understand Philippe Starck's work. He usually opposes it to the notion of style. For him, the aesthetic work on an object should no longer be stylistic but semantic. He frequently repeats, "I do not make shapes. I make meaning".

another essential expres

sion, that of "magic design", imparts Starck's dream of having the object disappear in favour of its use and of having a new relationship defined between man and object which is no longer technological in nature, but poetry, magic and sensuality. "Magic, means Kubrick", says Stark, "It is the monolith of "2001, Space Odyssey". It is that object which has descended from the Continued on page-12

Africa's New trouble-shooters Continued from page 10 nio Manuvakola, signed in his

democratically-elected government. Mandela put troops on the

Lesotho border, sent jets over the capital of Maseru and with Mugabe and President Quett Masire of Botswana negotiated a package that restored the civilian government in August. The most urgent problems

in the region are Angola and Mozambique, where wars have raged almost continuously for 30 years. Years of talks in Angola and

an election held under United Nations auspices failed to bring peace between the Luanda government and the rebel UNITA movement led by Jonas Savimbi.

fortably.

Now a peace treaty has been signed in Zambia. Till the last, it was touch and go. In the end Savimbi did not turn up and changed his mind when Muhis army chief, General Eugegabe told him firmly that he

place. But to underline the importance they attached to the occasion, Mandela and Mugabe both turned up to witness the November 20 signing. Later, Savimbi said he fully supported the treaty. In Mozambique, Mandela

and Mugabe have been simi larly forceful to ensure that the parties respect the results of the elections held there in October. Polling was judged by international observers to have been well carried out. The government of President. Joaquim Chissano won com

At one point, Afonso Dhlakama, leader of the Renamo rebel movement that is now the opposition party, indicated that he would not take part in the elections. He must toe the line and accept the result. Mandela and Mugabe see

gives, in the specialized or

new horizons opening up for southern Africa with the coming of democracy to south Africa. The region is rich in material and human resources which have been wasted for decades by civil strife.

Nelson Mandela is seen as someone who can use his great personal authority and prestige to help Africa restore its international reputation. The danger is that too much will be expected of him and that he will be distracted from the huge tasks facing him he is 76 and South Africans hope he will not be sucked into the many other problems of Africa, that range from Somalia to Rwanda.

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