

# **SLOW FADE**

by

J.A. MacAbee



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### **AUTHOR'S NOTE**

The production takes place in multiple settings. Because of the rather quick changes in scene, a barren stage is suggested and even encouraged to keep the simplicity of the production. Tangible physical settings not explicitly stated in the script are optional.

This script was inspired by the title song, “Slow Fade” by Casting Crowns. It is used in both the beginning and the end, as well as an interlude between scenes.

For all the men and women who have ever stumbled in life and has found themselves in need of grace, this play is dedicated to you.

Enjoy!

**CHARACTERS**

JAMES: Mid-30's

KATE: Mid-30's

MELISSA: Mid-20's

YOUNG JAMES: Adolescent

YOUNG KATE: Adolescent

**SETTING**

Present Day

## SLOW FADE

*(The lights rise on JAMES, standing on a barren center stage, holding a wilted flower)*

James: *(singing)*

*It's a slow fade  
When you give yourself away  
It's a slow fade  
When black and white are turned to grey  
When thoughts invade  
Choices are made  
A price will be paid  
When you give yourself away  
People never crumble in a day...*

A year ago I never saw myself here. No one ever does. I was happy. I had a beautiful wife. I had a high-ranking job at a prestigious law firm. Everything was just perfect. *(beat)* Then the very thing I had been praying for came to pass.

*(Light fades on JAMES as he walks off stage. A light shines on KATE on stage right. She is holding something behind her back)*

KATE: Hey James! I need you to come in here for a second.

JAMES: *(from offstage)* Hold on, I'll be right there.

KATE: This really can't wait.

JAMES: *(offstage)* You're going to need to give me a few more seconds.

KATE: *(anxiously)* James! Come on!

JAMES: *(offstage)* Would you like me to come out naked?

KATE: What if I said yes?

JAMES: *(walking into KATE's light. He is carrying a baseball mit)* Luckily for you and the rest of the world, I'm dressed.

KATE: Where are you going?

JAMES: The ball game, remember?

KATE: *(smirking)* Oh, that's right! That's fine; so long as you're able and willing to bring another person to the game next year.

JAMES: Honey, it's guys' night out. I promise I'll try to bring you to the next game.



KATE: Not *me*.

JAMES: Then who? Don't tell me your brother's coming into town.

KATE: No.

JAMES: Good, because if I have to hear one more time about his strange obsession with Windex, I might just snap.

KATE: No, I'm not talking about him. I'm talking about...

*(KATE looks down at her stomach. JAMES takes a while to realize what she is indicating, then instantly grows eagerly excited)*

JAMES: *(surprise)* No! No way! You're really –

KATE: Pregnant! And I have a feeling it's a boy!

JAMES: You just feel it?

KATE: Yup. Get that mini-mit ready. We're going to have quite a talented short-stop on our hands.

JAMES: *(taking it all in)* I mean, are you sure?

KATE: You don't trust a mother's instinct?

JAMES: I just can't believe it. *(he smiles)* I'm gonna have a son! I'm gonna have a son! *(shouting)* YOU HEAR THAT WORLD?! I'M GONNA HAVE A SON!

*(KATE laughs at his exuberant exaltations and exits. JAMES walks back to center stage)*

KATE: James Donovan, you're going to wake up the whole neighborhood!

JAMES: *(runs to KATE, puts his arms around her, and kisses her)* Then let them be awoken.

KATE: *(smiles)* I know this means a lot to you.

JAMES: We're going to be a full family now. You, me, one girl, and one boy.

KATE: I'm just as excited as you are.

JAMES: Hey babe.

KATE: Yes?

JAMES: I love you.

KATE: I love you too. *(she leans in, gives him a kiss, and releases from their embrace)* Now get going to your guys' night. Don't be too crazy, okay?

JAMES: You got it.

*(KATE exits)*

JAMES: *(to audience)* We were going to have a baby. A boy. Confirmed by the doctors. Saturday, July 15<sup>th</sup>. Kate was so excited. I was ecstatic; exuberant. I wanted a boy to carry on the family name, you know? There's a special bond a father and son share. It's written in the blood. He'll grow up to be the spitting

image of his dad, though hopefully with perhaps a little more athleticism, height, and muscle mass. *(he smiles. Lights come up on a desk space. JAMES sits in the chair and continues to speak to the audience)* I started working overtime at the office to begin to garner a little more money to start an investment fund for another kid. *(beat)* Then one afternoon a woman, a young lady, came to my door to hand me some files.

*(MELISSA walks on stage and stands at a distance, seemingly waiting to be let in. JAMES cannot take his eyes off her)*

JAMES: She was brilliantly beautiful. She was in this hot red suit that showed off all her curves, and... wow.

MELISSA: Mr. Donovan?

JAMES: *(begins to work)* Yes! Come in.

MELISSA: Here are the files on the Malcolm case.

JAMES: Thank you, Miss...

MELISSA: *(holds out hand)* Melissa. Melissa Jenkins.

JAMES: *(he shakes her hand)* Are you new here? I don't believe I've seen you around?

MELISSA: I just started yesterday, Mr. Donovan.

JAMES: Please, call me James.

MELISSA: *(smiles)* James. It's been wonderful working for your company. I feel quite honored to work for such a prestigious firm.

JAMES: We're honored to have you as well, Ms. Jenkins.

MELISSA: Thank you, Mr... James. *(beat)* And if I can do *anything* for you, please just let me know. My office is just down the hall.

JAMES: Thank you, Ms. Jenkins.

MELISSA: Please, call me Melissa.

JAMES: *(smiles)* Thank you, Melissa.

*(MELISSA exits. James gets up from his chair and spotlight remains solely on him at center stage)*

JAMES: *(to audience)* I remember a middle school gym teacher once told me being married was like eating: there was nothing wrong with looking at the buffet even if you're full. Somehow, even as a 7<sup>th</sup> grader, I knew something in that phrase was... weird. I thought that, once you're married, your attraction to any other woman completely diminishes, even pop stars. Jennifer Aniston has been around the block one too many times; Angelina Jolie has too big of lips; Megan Fox you realize really *is* too foxy. It's just you and her. You and Kate. Or so you think... I still remember the first time we met.

*(JAMES turns to look on as lights come up on a scene of two children playing in a sand box)*

YOUNG KATE: *(holding dolls)* Whatcha doin'?

YOUNG JAMES: *(holding action figures)* Playing batman! He's about the drive away in the batmobile to go fight crime!

YOUNG KATE: That's cool. *(beat)* I'm Kate.

YOUNG JAMES: What are you doing here?

YOUNG KATE: My mommy just dropped me off here so she can read books with your mommy.

YOUNG JAMES: *(preoccupied)* Okay.

YOUNG KATE: Did you want to do something?

*(YOUNG JAMES continues to be immersed in his action figures. YOUNG KATE stands there for a short time, waiting for a response, growing ever more frustrated.)*

YOUNG KATE: *(yelling at him and waving)* Hello!

YOUNG JAMES: What?

YOUNG KATE: Did you want to play?

YOUNG JAMES: Play what?

YOUNG KATE: I don't know. Doctor!

YOUNG JAMES: What's that?

YOUNG KATE: We have to pretend we have a person on a table and we're going to cut him open.

YOUNG JAMES: *(intrigued)* That sounds dangerous.

YOUNG KATE: Oh! It is! You have to shout things like "Hand me the scalpel!" and "It's not working!" and "Clear!" My mommy watches all the TV shows. People die all the time.

YOUNG JAMES: *(excited)* So, who are we cutting open?

YOUNG KATE: No one.

YOUNG JAMES: *(loses interest)* Oh.

YOUNG KATE: If that doesn't sound good... we could play house.

YOUNG JAMES: How do you do that?

YOUNG KATE: It's like a normal house. I'll play the mommy and you play the daddy.

YOUNG JAMES: I don't have a daddy.

YOUNG KATE: Yes you do! Everyone has one!

YOUNG JAMES: No, I don't.

YOUNG KATE: *(beat)* Oh. Well, we could still –

YOUNG JAMES: You have a bug on your shirt!

*(YOUNG KATE looks down at her shirt and begins to scream. She continues to do so as she runs around. YOUNG JAMES catches her, flicks the bug off, and squashes it)*

YOUNG JAMES: Got it!

YOUNG KATE: *(looking down at swished bug)* You saved me!

*(YOUNG KATE leans in and gives YOUNG JAMES a peck on the cheek. YOUNG JAMES is immediately freaked out, but begins to blush)*

YOUNG JAMES: What was that for?

YOUNG KATE: For saving me.

YOUNG JAMES: *(beat)* Weird.

*(Lights fade on the children and spotlight again lies solely on James)*

JAMES: We didn't date for a while clearly. I'll always remember that kiss though. It wasn't until senior year of high school I got up the courage to ask her to prom. She said yes. *(smiles)* I was so confident she would and stuff, you know... *(he laughs)* Just kidding. I was truthfully scared out of my mind. *(beat)* And then, afterwards, she continued to say "yes" to many other important questions. The rest, as they say, is history.

*(Lights fade on JAMES and come up on KATE, preparing a meal in what would be their kitchen. JAMES comes into the light with a briefcase and continues to walk where KATE is standing. KATE clearly doesn't see him come in. JAMES takes advantage of the opportunity by sneaking up behind her)*

JAMES: Boo!

KATE: *(screams, beat)* James! You can't do that to a pregnant woman!

JAMES: *(laughs)* I'm sorry.

KATE: It's like you're five again.

JAMES: Just trying to practice with my playful side before the little guy comes along.

KATE: That's fine. Did you get the taxes done like you said you would?

JAMES: No, I haven't gotten to –

KATE: If you could get those done soon, that would be great. They're due next week, and you know I'm terrible with numbers. Also, the water stopped working

this afternoon. I'm figuring it's something with the pipes. Since we're trying to be a bit more frugal these days, I thought you might take a look at it?

JAMES: Honey, I can but –

KATE: Lastly, I know we have 8 months to go, but I was really liking the name Peter today. It's short, it's nice, it doesn't remind me of your uncle, and Peter Donovan just has a nice ring doesn't it?

JAMES: Honey! Relax! I come home from a long day and I feel like I'm being bombarded. Can we just... slow down?

KATE: Yes, I'm sorry.

JAMES: *(breathes)* How was your day today?

KATE: Well, I had an ultrasound today you apparently couldn't make.

JAMES: You never told me you were getting an ultrasound?

KATE: Yes, I did, but you clearly weren't listening.

JAMES: *(frustrated)* How does he look?

KATE: He's looking fine. Coming along perfectly. *(she smiles)* Let's just hope he's a better listener than his old man. *(beat)* What's wrong?

JAMES: *(beat)* I just feel overwhelmed. I had to bring home work from the office, and now I feel like you're attacking me, listing off tasks for me to do, and I –

KATE: Oh, goodness. James, you know I love you. It's the hormones. I love you very much. *(she kisses him on the cheek)*

JAMES: I'm glad. *(beat)* You know what would be great?

KATE: *(smiling)* What would be great?

JAMES: *(sighs)* If you and I had a nice night where we maybe just settled down, watched a movie, had a glass of wine, and maybe... you know... whoopee!

KATE: Oh my gosh, no. James, we can't.

JAMES: You know you can't resist these smooth moves. *(he begins to attempt to humorously dance, clearly aware the fact that his dancing is indeed the opposite of smooth)*

KATE: James, we can't do that.

JAMES: We can't what?

KATE: I'm not drinking alcohol during my pregnancy and I'm most certainly not making any whoopee.

JAMES: It didn't affect last time.

KATE: I'm trying to be extra careful this time. You never know.

JAMES: It's the first month of your pregnancy!

KATE: And you can never be too careful.

JAMES: So, what? Eight months?

KATE: You'll be fine.

JAMES: I'm sure I will, honey. And I'll support you in any and every way you want me to. It's just... weird.

KATE: I'll be right here and we can kiss all you want, and you *know* I can kiss.  
(*beat*) Just don't squish the stomach. (*she smiles and walks up close to him, putting her hands around his neck*) I love you. (*she kisses JAMES*)

JAMES: I love you, too.

KATE: Now, you know what I want you to do?

JAMES: Yes?

KATE: Taxes and Pipes.

JAMES: (*sighs*) Yes, ma'am.

(*Lights fade on the living room. JAMES reappears center stage with the spotlight on him*)

JAMES: I struggled with pornography as a kid. Without a father, I really didn't know how to view women or treat women properly. So much of the time, they were objects without feelings. I did a lot of things in middle and high school that I am not proud of. I mean, I'm talking *everything* you can think of, I pretty much was a part of. But luckily, my mom convinced me to start meeting with the youth pastor from the church we went to, Tom. He mentored, guided, disciplined, whatever-term-you-want-to-use'd me. (*beat*) He became kinda an older brother I never had. Still, I wasn't willing to give up my pleasure-seeking life, even for God. It just *felt* great. To be young, wild, and free! It felt like the ultimate trip. (*beat*) Until I got to know *her*. You know, *her*. The one that you see and she takes your breath away the moment she walks into the room. She makes you feel young, wild, and free... and more. Even ironically, this particular girl does it all without breaking even one of mom's rules, including abstinence. (*beat*) It was Kate; a one in a million girl. And she was worth the wait. She was breathtaking on our wedding day. I mean, I'm talking beyond beautiful. I was a new man because of her. She and Tom both made me grow up. I learned self-control, patience, peace, kindness, gentleness, and most importantly, I learned how to truly unself-seekingly love a person of the opposite sex. (*beat*) But I guess this beast, this lust, was still inside me somewhere, aching to get out.

(*Melissa's voice is heard off stage*)

MELISSA: (*from offstage*) James, I have the papers for the Ulysses trial.

(*JAMES walks towards his desk and sits down. At the same time, MELISSA comes walking from off-stage towards his desk with a stack of papers*)

JAMES: Oh, yes, Melissa. Come on in.

MELISSA: (*she places the papers on the desk*) There you are. Is there something else I can help you with?

JAMES: No, no. I'm fine. How are you finding the company and your new surroundings?

MELISSA: It's odd really. I'm making friends, but not connecting with anyone in particular. The city is big and I feel like I need a tour of the best spots, but I don't really know anyone who could show me.

JAMES: Don't you have a roommate?

MELISSA: My mom set me up with a family friend, but let's just say she isn't the most engaging of friends.

JAMES: Sleeper?

MELISSA: Couch Potato.

JAMES: (*smiling*) I'm assuming there is no chance she is a lively couch potato?

MELISSA: (*smiles*) If by lively you mean stands up to get more ice cream from the fridge occasionally, then yes. She is *very* lively.

JAMES: (*he laughs*) What does she do for a living?

MELISSA: She works at a bank. I feel like she isn't around people very much.

JAMES: She's the kind that stays home all night and watches Law and Order marathons, isn't she?

MELISSA: (*she smiles*) See where I'm running into trouble?

JAMES: (*laughs*) Your parents clearly know how to pick 'em.

MELISSA: Mom, does too much to know these things. She tries though.

JAMES: (*curious*) And what about your father?

MELISSA: (*hesitantly*) He's not really around.

JAMES: (*smiles warmly at her*) My father left me before I even knew him. Your voice there indicated something like that. (*beat*) I'm sorry.

MELISSA: (*beat*) I'm sorry for you, too.

*(there is a small silence between them, but they continue to make eye contact throughout this silence)*

JAMES: Well, how about I get you connected with some of the young staffers? I could –

MELISSA: Tried it. I get along with them, but (*choosing her words*) they're not the most... civilized crowd for a night on the town.

JAMES: What do you mean?

MELISSA: I'm not much for sketchy bars with pole-dancing and hard liquor.

JAMES: (*laughs*) I can probably guess who you're talking about.

MELISSA: There *have to* be other things to do in this city?

JAMES: You ever adventure alone?

MELISSA: (*slight sassiness*) I'm a girl. It's not about to happen.

JAMES: Right. *(beat)* Well, why don't I show you around the city?

MELISSA: *(pleasantly surprised)* You'd do that for me?

JAMES: It *is* my job to make sure you as our newest employee are as comfortable as possible while here.

MELISSA: Thank you. You're a saint. *(she puts her hand on JAMES's hand on the desk)* I know we're going to have a *great* time.

JAMES: So, Friday?

MELISSA: Sounds perfect.

*(MELISSA smiles at him and leaves, his eyes following her on her way out)*

JAMES: What was I doing? All of the sudden, it was like a fight inside my head. One side said, "What are you doing?! You're taking a flirtatious girl out on a date in the city!" And the other side said, "Relax! It's going to be fun! You're not going to *do* anything. It's just for business. You'll be *fine*." *(beat)* I listened to the second voice. I mean, I love Kate. I do.

*(KATE abruptly comes into his spotlight)*

KATE: What is this, James?

JAMES: What?

KATE: I was going over the finances and you took out five hundred dollars on Saturday the 12<sup>th</sup>?

JAMES: It was poker night.

KATE: You need five hundred dollars to play poker?

JAMES: I bought back in a few times, okay?

KATE: Oh, so now it's fine?

JAMES: We have enough money.

KATE: We are trying to save for another baby in five months!

JAMES: We have enough money, Kate! It's not like we're in the poor house!

KATE: You need to learn to be more responsible with your money.

JAMES: I'm one who makes the money! I should be able to decide where it goes!

KATE: It's *our* money. It's *your children's* money.

JAMES: Okay, let's see what you're spending.

*(Spotlight falls off JAMES and Kitchen area lights up. On a stool are the financial statements, which JAMES briskly walks towards and takes in hand, begining to read. KATE quickly follows behind him)*

JAMES: I'm seeing two hundred dollars here from the outlet. Care to explain that?

KATE: I've budgeted for it!



JAMES: And then another one hundred and fifty? What do you need more clothes for? You already have plenty in that walk-in closet upstairs!

KATE: I'm pregnant and nothing fits!

JAMES: What happened to your other pregnant clothes?

KATE: They're out of style!

JAMES: Oh, so you get spending money, and I don't?

KATE: We didn't *budget* for it this month.

JAMES: Stop acting like it's going to drive us into massive debt.

KATE: It's the principle, James. You need to be more disciplined. Stop pretending you're some hot shot throwing money around with your friends.

JAMES: I own my own law firm!

KATE: Grow up, James! *(beat. Both stare at each other)* You can sleep on the couch tonight.

*(Lights fade. JAMES comes back to center stage. Stop-light comes back on him. He begins to put on a suit jacket and studs, getting dressed up to an invisible mirror)*

JAMES: Kate went to be with her parents that Thursday for the weekend. It was already a planned visit. It just so happened that that Friday was the night that Melissa and I had agreed to go out. You know, I mean it's not like that wasn't somewhat strategically planned by me... I didn't bother telling Kate because, as I put it to myself, "It might give her the wrong impression. This was a business activity to show the new employee around to some of the city hotspots. That's all." That's all. *(beat)* Secretly though, I think I wanted something to happen between us.

*(Lights come up on a table with complete table settings and filled wine glasses. The sound of a bustling crowd of people inside a club plays in the background. JAMES and MELISSA meet each other at the table and sit down, the background softly growing more and more quiet)*

MELISSA: That's so funny! You really think that?

JAMES: I'm telling you, it gives a whole new meaning to the phrase "Can I have a ham sandwich."

MELISSA: That is too funny, Jimmy.

JAMES: Jimmy? Gosh, no one's called me that since grade school. I suppose we should be drinking juice boxes if this is to be the case. *(holding up his wine glass, calling for the waiter)* Waiter! Yes! I do not know what this is that you have given me, but it is clearly not juicy juice! I demand my juice box!

MELISSA: *(she laughs)* You're hilarious, Jimmy!

JAMES: Really? Thanks. I tell the same jokes at home, but no one seems to laugh these days.

MELISSA: Then clearly they don't appreciate what they have.

JAMES: Well, thank you for boosting my ego. It's appreciated. (*catching himself*) Now, this is the Café Nuirah. From my understanding, it is one of the top spots for young people in the city to meet and mingle.

MELISSA: (*looking around*) It's quite a jungle in here.

JAMES: Very much so, but there are some nice guys. I think I know a couple of the people from the office that come down here occasionally. (*looks around*) Or would I be wrong in making that assumption?

MELISSA: Seeing where they took me before, this place would need a couple of more rats before it suited their fancy.

JAMES: Well, I've seen a couple of men over there who I bet if you were to leave me and sit at the bar, they might ask you for a dance. And they look less like blood-thirsty rats and more like saintly choirboys, which is always a plus.

MELISSA: (*flirtatiously*) Why would I want to meet other guys when I have a great guy right in front of me?

JAMES: (*insistent*) Because you need to meet other people.

MELISSA: I'll meet other people later. Right now, it's you and me, and I'm completely content with that. Aren't you?

JAMES: (*beat*) If that's what you really want.

MELISSA: Can I be honest with you for a second?

JAMES: Sure.

MELISSA: You know what I really want?

JAMES: What do you want?

MELISSA: I want to get out of here. Some place where you and I can talk. (*she leans in*) In private.

(*Lights blackout. A spotlight comes back on JAMES, alone on the barren stage*)

JAMES: Next thing you know, I agree. I was having such a great time, *we* were having such a great time, and her leaving meant I was alone, and no one likes being alone on a Friday night, right? So, one thing leads to another, and I find myself checking us into a hotel room and... well... (*Silence*) I don't know why I did it. I mean, Kate and I had just had a fight. I guess I had just felt so trapped. With a stressful job, a wife who is continuously hormonal and occasionally distant, and well, no sexual outlet... I guess I just decided that I wanted to have a night for myself. No one would find out. I just wanted... freedom. I wanted for once in a long time to feel young, wild, and free. You never imagine it - doing something like that. And when you do, it's surprisingly amazing. Sure, there's some guilt, but

it was once. Just once. No one will ever know. So, at the end of it all, I had to say the weekend was quite –

*(KATE abruptly walks onto the stage and a spotlight comes upon her)*

KATE: Hi, honey! I'm home early. *(she kisses JAMES)* How was the weekend without me?

JAMES: *(caught off-guard)* Uneventful. *(MELISSA stands on a platform, overlooking the couple. JAMES notices her and tries to ignore the figment of his imagination)* I just had some early nights and enjoyed some TV. How was your parents' place?

KATE: It was nice seeing them again. They needed a lot of maintenance on the house. Dad doesn't have the same capabilities he had 10 years ago. It would have been nice to have you.

JAMES: I know. Works calls.

KATE: Well, I'm just excited you're working extra hard for little James Jr. in here. *(touches her stomach)*

JAMES: Is that what we're naming him?

KATE: I don't know. I like it though. Let's hope he turns out to be just like his old man though, right?

JAMES: *(beat)* Yeah.

KATE: Is something wrong? You seem out of it?

JAMES: *(he looks up to see MELISSA, smiling at him)* No, I'm fine. It was just a long weekend.

KATE: Well I'm glad to be back with you. You know something else? I think I felt the baby kick today!

JAMES: Really?

KATE: We might have a soccer player on our hands instead of a baseball player after all!

JAMES: That's great, Kate.

KATE: *(recognizing something on the table)* Oh! Did you not clean this weekend! I told you to clean! You know I clean every Saturday. Now I'm going to be behind on the schedule, James. You know how I run. Why didn't you clean?

JAMES: Babe, I'm sorry. I just forgot. I'll help you clean now if you'd like?

KATE: No, that's fine. I'll do it myself. Just please be a bit more responsible when I'm not here, alright?

*(The line "It's a slow fade" plays as lights fade on the kitchen and on MELISSA. JAMES steps back into the center of the stage, a single spotlight on him)*

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### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

From his days of being a wee lad, Mr. J.A. MacAbee grew up under the bright sun of tropical Florida. He grew up believing he would be the heir-apparent to one Mr. Michael Jeffrey Jordan. However, as he matured, a shorter stature and limited lateral quickness undercut this dream to the point where he needed to reevaluate his future dramatically. Ironically, it was in drama he found a new passion. Since, he has been actively involved in drama, creative writing, and especially competitive speech (or forensics). Currently, J.A. is high school teaching and working towards his Masters in Divinity. *Soli Deo Gloria!*

# **SLOW FADE**

by J.A. MacAbee

GENRE: DRAMA (One-Act)

CAST: 1 Male, 2 Female

## **SUMMARY:**

High school sweethearts, JAMES and KATE, have had a beautiful love story for as long as anyone can remember. With a second child on the way, JAMES looks to work more hours to begin saving for the child's future. However, with ever frequent arguments at home and new company employee MELISSA entering the scene, JAMES begins on the slow descent into a cheating double-life. With time, it becomes harder and harder for him to choose what life he wishes to live. SLOW FADE is ultimately a story about love, betrayal, regret, and the shattering ripple effect of second glances.

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