



hemp conspiracy

A true story of state corruption and individual consequence

Paul Wylie



A TRUE STORY
OF STATE CORRUPTION
AND INDIVIDUAL CONSEQUENCE



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Paul T. Wylie



Black Eye Publishing
Guelph

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This book is dedicated
to

Ivonne Lopez Gomez,
the love of my life.

“Esta es la historia de
neustra vida de amor,
de los tiempos dificiles
quevivimos, el vinculo
de amor que latiri por
siempre nosotros.”

Te Amo, Mi Amor.

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A true survivor

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Saw me through.

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At great consequence to herself.

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Nicaragua – the land of lakes, volcanoes and natural disasters. But some disasters are not natural. They are man-made.

Nicaragua is a beautiful, bright, sunny country darkened by politics!

Religion and morality are the cornerstones of mankind. We have morality, but lack religious faith. In Central America, there is great faith in religion but little morality. The country is plagued by a political system that promotes immoral, sometimes unlawful behavior. Those in power have no interest in the public's welfare. They are not confronting the real problems that come with power. In the guise of public service, they use whatever comes to hand for personal gain. This political chaos encourages corruption, a necessary ingredient for greed and a hunger for money, which drives the system.

-Paul Wylie - "Views of Arnaldo Alemans' Government"



Chapter Three

“LA LOMA DE TISCAPA”

AS WE DROVE into my laneway, I had the dreadful feeling that something terrible was going to happen - the last two weeks had not gone well. The interview with the Nicaraguan narcotic officers and the DEA had certainly not gone well, the whole experience had been bad in the extreme and now our accounts had been seized without reason. I was glad to have Juan Francisco with me. He was more than the company accountant; he was my primary translator and confidant. In the last couple of days, he'd helped steady my nerves. We'd provided the authorities with everything they requested, and then some. I was satisfied we could do no more but wait and at least try to go about business as usual.

“Doctor, I think we've got more problems”,

exclaimed Juan, using the title given most professionals in Nicaragua. "The military are on the highway, checking vehicles".

"Don't worry about them. They're just looking at car documents, Juan". I tried to sound convincing, but failed. "Try to relax, okay?"

I couldn't help smiling as we drove into the yard. I really liked it here; it was not only beautiful, it was my home, my peace of mind. During the last month, Ivonne and I had painted the old plantation house. The yard was immaculate, with towering mango trees providing some welcome shade. As it was Christmas time, all the shrubs were flowering. I was truly proud of my home, and Ivonne, who did the lion's share of the work around the house. We were going to have the best Christmas together, just the two of us.

"Juan, how about coming in and having a drink? You can see Ivonne and talk some Spanish while I fix us some munchies", I said, trying to lighten up the situation. After all, Christmas is not the time to feel depressed over problems that you can't do anything about. It's a time for rejoicing the birth of Christ, a time when family and friends come together, shed past differences and celebrate the season. This was to be a happy time!

"Doctor, I'm going home", Juan replied. "It's been another brutal day, amigo. Say hi to the misus for me, and I will pick you up at the same time, in the mañana. Oh, by the way - get some sleep, you look like shit".

"Thanks, amigo", I said. "Esta es un bueno idea! If I were you, I would take a different route home.

I don't want any bad phone calls tonight".

"Oh, don't worry about that, boss. You don't get any phone calls here. You just go missing!" Juan quipped.

Ivonne stood in the doorway, smiling. Our two toucans stood guard beside her. It looked like a photo for Better Homes and Gardens.

"Hi, sweetheart", I greeted her, "and how was your day in paradise? You look terrific; anybody tell you that today?" I tried to sound like everything was normal, concealing my feeling of impending doom.

"Just fine, amor", she replied. "Now that I've got you home at a decent hour, we can spend some time preparing for Christmas. Today's the twenty-third, if you haven't noticed. Tomorrow is the Christmas party with my family and you haven't picked up the presents yet! What am I going to do with you!?"

"For starters, you can give me a great big kiss. Then, after that, we take it from there".

"Hold your horses, lover boy; you've got phone messages. Some very strange ones, Paul. We aren't in any trouble, are we?" inquired Ivonne.

"Why would you say that, Ivonne?"

"Well, Danilo phoned and he sounded worried, Paul. That tells me something is wrong". There was a slight tremor in her voice.

"No, it will be okay", I assured her. "We're under investigation, that's all. When they've had time to review all the material we've presented to them, they will see how ridiculous all this has been, and everything will be back to normal. Why don't you

go and get me a huge glass of lemonade while I sort out these phone calls, okay? Thanks, amor”.

I hoped I was reassuring enough but I could feel that dread return - a cold, unmistakable feeling you get when you realise that no matter what you do, the inevitable will happen. Later on in the afternoon, after a light supper, Ivonne listened to music while I worked on the computer. A vehicle pulled into the driveway. I recognised the car immediately; it belonged to the company lawyer. What is he doing here at this time? I wondered, and absently checked my watch: 6:15. It could only be bad news.

I told my security man to open the gate to let the car pass through and went out to the patio to greet Leonel Espinoza and José Talavera. I could tell by their expressions that things were bad, and both lawyers coming to see me at this time in the evening only confirmed this. These guys just don't make house calls.

“Good evening, gentlemen. What brings you to my home tonight? I don't believe this is a social visit”, I stated.

“Paul, can we go inside?” Leonel looked worried and harried. “Paul, turn on your television, right now”, he ordered.

“What channel?” I asked, not yet fully digesting this.

“Any channel; it's on all of them”, towering José Talavera declared nonchalantly. He looked down at me and smiled. He was a guy who liked trouble - I suppose the more there was the richer he got. I complied, and there before my eyes, on national

television, the police were announcing that our research site at Sabana Grande was growing marijuana! I stood transfixed, staring at the screen, not believing any of this. The police went on to say that arrest warrants had been issued for the Hemp-Agro associates and myself.

“You must leave here immediately, Paul”, Leonel said, snapping me out of my shock. He stared intently at me. “I’m your lawyer; I will advise you of what must be done. First, take all the company documents and files to a hiding place. No matter what happens, the police must not seize those original documents. Tomorrow José will hold a press conference with you, explaining your side of the story. We’ll have you home for Christmas”.

One look at Ivonne, and I saw the whole picture. I expected to see disbelief, but seeing her look of shock and mind-numbing panic was like being hit by a Mack truck.

We held each other tight and she whispered in my ear, “I’m scared, Paul”.

“I am too, sweetheart”.

I raced around the office, collecting all the files and my brief case, which still contained the employees’ Christmas money. I took a last look at my office. At the door, Ivonne gave me a hug and a kiss. I assured her that everything would be okay and that I would phone later in the evening. I hurried over to the lawyers’ car without looking back – it was hard enough leaving as it was. I climbed into the back seat, anxious to be underway – my heart was pounding.

“Where to, Paul? We cannot be taken into custo-

dy with you, so we will have to drop you off somewhere safe. You will have to make your own way. In the morning, telephone José to come to pick you up so you can turn yourself in", Leonel said.

"Take me to Yuri's house", I replied. "I'll keep the documents there until they're needed".

"Lay on the floor till we get out of here", José told me. "They will be watching the house to see who is coming and going".

I lay on the floor of Leonel's car, thinking, this can't be happening to me! Snap out of it, Paul! I told myself, you've got to think this through clearly. Listen to your own words of advice - get a game plan together, stay focused, take one step at a time.

We reached Yuri's house and no sooner had I got out of the car and said good-bye - Leonel sped off, probably as panic-stricken as I was. I felt certain that the documents would be safe with Yuri, who was not only a close friend of Danilo but was also a very powerful figure in the military. Earlier in the day I had given his brother my passport and \$1200.00 in cash to have my passport updated and stamped. I needed my passport now. If need be, I could escape back to Canada. At the door a furious and extremely nervous Yuri confronted me. I tried my best to calm him down, but he was adamant.

"Get out of here, now!" he kept saying.

"Yuri, where is my passport?" I asked calmly. "I need my passport now, and then I will go, okay?"

Yuri had lost all composure. "My brother has your passport and he is not home. You must leave now!"

“Tranquilo, amigo. Esta es bien”, I said.

Turning away from the door, I glanced around to see if there were any parked cars with curious occupants. Satisfied that there weren't any observers, I moved off, walking in the shadows. I was truly alone and gripped by an overwhelming fear of the unknown. Perhaps I would wake up and find myself at home. I needed desperately to get to a phone to call Grant and tell him of the trouble; between the two of us, we could surely come up with some idea. At this moment, just to hear his voice would have been reassuring. The owners of the Margot Hotel were okay; Grant and I had stayed there often enough. If I could make it there, they would be discreet. I would be safe, at least for a night. Grant could call and we could make plans. As I walked I thought of Canada. Man, I thought, would I ever like to be there now.

Reaching the major thoroughfare, I hailed a taxi. The taxi had another occupant so remembering that some taxi operators were police informants, I told the driver I wanted to go to the Intercontinental Hotel. From there, it was only a short distance to the Margot Hotel. I could travel that far undetected. The taxi driver dropped off his previous fare and continued on. We made no conversation and that was fine with me; all I wanted was to get to a phone. We'd nearly reached the military hospital two blocks from my destination when a Toyota pulled in ahead of us and parked broadside across the road. Motorcycles pulled up to the taxi windows, their riders wore balaclavas and were obviously heavily armed.

Just the sight of them put the fear of God into the taxi driver. He yelled, "Robbery! Get down!" and drove the car up over the curb onto the sidewalk and around the Toyota. I heard rapid gunfire and the back window shattered, raining glass on me. The gunfire continued until the back tires were hit, disabling the taxi. The driver managed to make it to the military hospital parking lot. I tried to open the rear door to make a run for it, but when I pulled on the lever, it came off in my hand. I looked up to see guns pointing at me from every direction. Trying to resist would be foolish. These guys meant business. I had no other option but to raise my hands.

"Get out of the car, keep your hands in clear view", shouted one of the masked marauders. "Where is your pistol, we know you are carrying. Where is your pistol?" he kept repeating.

"I don't have a gun! For fuck's sake, take it easy!"

"Get out of the car", he said with an intensity that would melt steel.

"Okay, I'm getting out, and I'm unarmed". I opened the window so I could reach outside to open the door, all the while keeping my eyes riveted on the gunman.

When the door was fully open and I had one foot on the pavement, they came at me from every angle, lifting me into the air and slamming me down on the trunk of the car. Now they had all the company documents, the workers' Christmas money and of course, me.

Sitting in the back seat of the Toyota, sandwiched

between two gorillas with my hands cuffed behind my back was not the most comfortable position to be in. As luck would have it, I was not going to be riding very far with my abductors. I suspected where they were taking me - back up the hill to the offices of DIC for interrogation. The last time I was there, I knew I would be returning home. This time I wasn't so sure. As we approached, the guard at the gate shone a flashlight onto my face, trying to catch a glimpse of who I might be.

"Open the gate; we have a transport", the driver said.

"Where are your papers, señor?" asked the guard with a smile that showed off his missing front tooth. You could tell by his uniform, which was two sizes too big for him despite the belly that hung out over his belt, that this man was destined to be a gatekeeper for a very long time.

"If you please, you'll find we are expected", the driver said, demonstrating the typical Nicaraguan patience. Even the simplest tasks are carried out with unnecessary difficulty.

"Yes, I will. It will take a few moments", the guard muttered over his shoulder as he shuffled over to his post. Before the guard could check, out of the dark came a figure dressed in a black US-style S.W.A.T. team uniform. His eyes took in the situation for a second and his gloved hand brought a walkie-talkie to his mouth. He spoke a few words; immediately, the gates swung open.

Our cavalcade sped up the narrow, twisting road that led to the Police compound. At the interrogation offices, I was let out of the car and told to wait

beside it. Everyone dispersed in two's or three's, leaving me standing there with my hands cuffed behind my back. I knew I was being watched and was going nowhere. My last time here at La Loma de Tiscapa, I'd noticed that, straight ahead of me across the parking lot, some one hundred meters past the commemorative artillery piece, the ground dropped off. You could probably clamber down the bank, but after negotiating the treacherous slope, you faced a fence, beyond which lay residences that probably housed police families. No, I would need an accomplice and two free hands to escape, neither of which I had at the moment.

A long line of offices extended fifty meters on my right. Across from these offices was another building where the chiefs of staff were located. This was where I'd had my interview with the DEA and the Nicaraguan narcotic officer. To my left were interview rooms and beyond those were the infamous jail cells that used to house Somoza's political prisoners. If those walls could talk of the horrors that went on in there; it didn't bare thinking about, especially in this situation. Even if only a small percent of the rumours were true, it would be enough to give most people sleepless nights. Past the cellblock, the roadway led to the guard kiosk. Behind me, a small courtyard contained a sitting area. The police barracks were on the right side of the courtyard and an interview room was on the left; behind there was the embankment. Tempting as it was, I would have been a fool to try. Perhaps even a dead fool.

I stood inhaling the cool night breeze and trying

to collect my thoughts. Why was this happening? Who was behind this? I had so many questions and no answers. Only a few days ago, I'd been here supplying these bastards with enough literature and legal documentation to keep them reading for a month. I gazed down at the volcanic lagoon, Tiscapa, under the watchful eye of the immense steel statue of Sandino, ironically - the freedom fighter. If he'd only known that the oppression he fought against would be replaced with oppression in another form! Left wing politics all sound great, in theory. However, in practice, their policies only become a menace to the people they are enforced upon.

"Bring the gringo in here".

Hearing this snapped me out of my thoughts. Two guards were heading in my direction. I knew my time was up. I turned and walked toward them, determined not to let them break me. After all, I knew I wasn't guilty of anything; I had committed no offence against the Republic of Nicaragua. I was sure when my lawyers came, I would be released immediately to go home to Ivonne for Christmas. I was taken into the interview room and motioned to sit down in a chair that faced an area where ten or fifteen police officers came and went, all in a constant state of agitation. There, on a table, lay my briefcase and documents, the focal point of this frenzy. One of the policemen held up an empty holster and shook it in my face.

"Where is the pistol?" he demanded. "There is no need to lie; we have the holster, now we need to know where the pistol is".

"I told you before and I'm telling you now, I never had a gun!" I retorted angrily.

"Then where did this come from? You will tell us, gringo. The night is early", said the officer.

His smile gave me a cold chill. I knew this guy had planted the holster. What else would he plant in order to detain me? This was nerve racking. Half an hour went by. It was grim. My hands were still cuffed behind my back and had now gone completely numb; my wrists were on fire. It was hard to sit still in the chair, but every time I moved the cuffs would dig deeper, my wrists burning more intensely. When I asked if the cuffs could be loosened, they just shrugged off the request. I think they enjoyed knowing I was in discomfort. I made up my mind that, no matter how much I had to endure, I would never grovel but the whole situation was painful.

A tall, large-framed man entered the room. He carried himself with an arrogant air of authority - this must be my interrogator. He wore no uniform but was well dressed in an expensive designer polo shirt and tailored trousers, clearly not an ordinary police officer.

"Lieutenant, could you please clear the room and bring Captain Cuadra". His booming, authoritative voice resounded throughout the room.

"Yes, sir; at once". The lieutenant gestured for his men to vacate the room.

When only the interrogator and I remained, he sat down behind the desk and motioned for me to bring my chair closer. With great difficulty I slid the chair over to his desk. For a few moments he sat

looking through a file, seemingly lost in thought.

"I don't see anywhere here in this pile of papers that you are a violent sort. No need for you to be in handcuffs. Would you like a glass of water or a coffee, perhaps?" he said in perfect English. I was astounded. I guess the look on my face gave my astonishment away. "Yes, I speak English. I was raised in Bluefields". He said.

Bluefields is the largest Nicaraguan community on the Atlantic coast. It was a British colony at one time, settled by pirates and a base for the slave trade. The coast of Nicaragua is a hodgepodge of culture comprised of Miskito-speaking native Indians and English-speaking Afro-Caribbeans, with Spanish as the universal language.

"Superintendent Henry is my name, Mr. Wylie. If you'll excuse me for a moment, I'll go find someone to take those things off your wrists". With that he rose and went to the door to summon an officer with a set of keys.

I could not believe my 'fortune'. For the first time since this ordeal began, I felt a glimmer of hope. When this man heard how preposterous all of this was, he was sure to reconsider the outlandish claims against me and set me free. I could feel my luck turning. He returned with a policeman and a set of keys to remove my manacles. At first my fingers wouldn't move. They remained rigid until the blood started to circulate. I vigorously moved my wrists to get the feeling back.

"Thank you very much, Superintendent", I said with much gratitude.

A knock on the door announced the arrival of

Captain Cuadra; he, like the superintendent, had a military bearing. His uniform was neatly pressed; you could tell he'd been a soldier at one time. A subordinate entered with him, carrying a tray with two cups of coffee. What a contrast this guy was to the captain and superintendent! He wore a shirt that I'm sure he'd slept in, and his pants were not long enough for his gangly legs; they came to his shins. I smiled, trying not to laugh.

"Captain Cuadra and I will be conducting this part of the interview", Superintendent Henry stated. "At this point in the process, we are only concerned with compiling a list of the contents of the briefcase. All the documents will have to be listed, as well. May we please have the lock combination for the briefcase?"

"It's not locked. Just set the tumblers to zero and it will open". I took my first sip of coffee. It tasted wonderful. I could feel the warmth flowing into my extremities and I began to feel alive again. I closed my eyes, letting the coffee rejuvenate me.

When the captain opened the case, he whistled, bringing me out of my reverie. "Tell me something, Mr. Wylie. With this much cash on you, were you preparing to flee the country?"

"Captain, that money you see there is the Christmas bonus money for my employees. Tomorrow that has to be given to them for their Christmas!" I pleaded. It was true. Fifty families needed and were relying on that money. In Nicaragua, the labour law states that you must pay workers one-week's pay prior to Christmas. I knew my employees were counting on this money.

“Captain, count the money and document the total, please”, said the impassive Henry.

This is how it went. Each item was removed from the briefcase and I was questioned about it, then the article was documented. When they finished with the briefcase, Henry and the captain left the room. I was by myself. This guy never read me my rights, I thought - do people have rights here? He never told me I was being charged with a crime. What gives? I’ve been shot at, abducted at gunpoint, and now I’m being questioned against my will. This is bullshit! When they returned, I had myself worked up. I needed answers to some of my own questions. I stood to meet them and said, “Am I being charged with anything? Because, if I’m not, then I would like to go home”.

“You’re not going anywhere unless we tell you that you can”, said Captain Cuadra.

“Why do you think you are here?” queried Superintendent Henry.

“I don’t know why; suppose you tell me”, I demanded.

“Because we have determined that the plants growing in Sabana Grande are marijuana”, said Henry.

“That’s ridiculous!” I exclaimed. “I want my lawyer present, right now”.

“Who is your lawyer?” Henry asked.

“José Talavera. Here is his phone number”. I reached into my back pocket for my billfold and produced his business card.

Henry accepted the card, looked at it for a split second, and retorted, “In Nicaragua, we don’t

have to notify anyone. Right now, you will be escorted back to your place of residence and we will confiscate any other documents and search for contraband". With that said, Superintendent Henry stood and told Captain Cuadra to gather the goon squad.

"Mr. Wylie, we will talk again when you return. I'm sorry, but you have to be handcuffed; it's regulation". Henry turned to an officer, barked out a command, and strode out the door. I was told to stand up and turn around so they could put the bracelets on. I winced when they snapped them shut; my wrists were bruised from the last episode. I was taken back outside and loaded into a Wasp or Russian army jeep. The Russian military left all their equipment behind after the war, so the government gave the police the Wasps for transport vehicles.

I was seated between two police officers and across from me sat three more. They were making sure I wasn't going anywhere. The driver started the jeep and backed out of the parking space. In the middle of the parking lot, motorcycles and two more vehicles carrying more cops joined us. One man jumped out of the last jeep carrying something I could not recognise in the darkness. He put these items on the roofs of the vehicles. When he approached our transport, I realised he was setting lights on the roofs. After fifteen minutes or so, we were ready to roll. Down the hill we went, through the gate by the guard shack, and out onto the street. The wind in my face felt good. The cool night air pulled the sweat off my body like a

sponge. Thoughts of Ivonne came flooding into my mind. How was she coping with this?

I noticed how fast we were travelling. Whenever a traffic light was red, the driver sounded the siren and turned on the roof lights. He sped through each intersection, heedless of anyone or anything in our way. There was no regard for safety. He just kept his foot on the throttle and steered. As our cavalcade approached my front gate, I could see that all the lights were on in the house. We stopped at the front gates. I told the driver I had the keys for the gate and I was told to stand while another cop shoved his hand in my pocket to retrieve them before jumping over the side of the jeep to unlock the gate. The gates swung open and the jeep pulled up in front of the house.

Ivonne stood on the front porch with her arms crossed. She wore a look that said, "make my day" - she was ready to fight, and who could blame her. I just hoped the situation remained calm. As they led me from the jeep, I could hear Ivonne arguing with a police officer over their authorisation to search. When I reached the porch, Ivonne broke off the conversation and ran to hug and kiss me. It felt so good to be in her arms; my tension seemed to ebb away into the night. I could tell she'd been crying, in spite of her fresh application of makeup. To Ivonne, this must have felt like her happy, insulated world was crashing down around her shoulders. The police decided our time for intimacy was over.

As we entered the house, I whispered to Ivonne that she should follow the police around the house

to make sure they didn't plant anything - their average wage is not enough to support them, so they are always doing 'favours'. We entered the living room/office area as we came in through the front door, beyond this lay the kitchen and next to it a bathroom. The hall led to bedrooms, each with an en-suite bath. They sat me down in a chair beside my office desk. Ivonne brought me a glass of water to drink, but it was impossible for me to drink with my hands trussed behind my back. She asked if the handcuffs could be taken off. The request was denied, but she did manage to have them loosened, providing me with a little more comfort. Ivonne fed me water a little at a time then jumped up to follow when the officers moved toward another room.

The police were everywhere. Some searched outside in the yard. I had some one-hundred-pound bags of seed that were unusable for cultivation due to poor germination and had just bought new seed bags for our newly harvested crop. The police were engaged loading the lot into their trucks. Some of the police searched my office. They packed the computer into boxes and took any piece of paper that had writing on it. The office desk came with the house and the owner, General Alberto Montealegre Somoza, had some articles of his own in the desk. This caused some consternation! The police were reluctant to confiscate anything with his name on it. Montealegre had been in charge of the dictator Somoza's feared National Guard, and his name still carried considerable weight. The police decided to be careful with their search to

avoid any potentially unpleasant repercussions.

Ivonne entered the room and signalled that the search was complete in the back bedrooms. She looked tired and frightened. She didn't know what lay ahead, and no one gave her any answers.

"Lieutenant, my husband is a good man. Don't let any harm come to him", Ivonne pleaded. "He is a professional, not some dangerous criminal! He does not need to be treated like one".

"Señora, he will be detained at the Loma de Tiscapa for questioning", the lieutenant told her. "You can bring him breakfast tomorrow. We will let you talk to him. You will see - he will be fine. Who knows, in a day or two, you may have him back".

The police were occupied loading articles into the transport for several minutes, so I was able to speak with Ivonne. I explained what was immediately necessary, telling her whom to call in order to arrange legal representation. It was imperative that Grant be contacted but Ivonne was at a disadvantage here. She could not communicate directly with Canada because of the language difference, so she would have to use Danilo as a go between until we could set up a proper line of communication with Canada.

The police finished loading the vehicles. At any moment they would be back to take me away. Ivonne wrapped her arms around me and held me tight. All I could do was reassure her that this was only temporary and I would be home in a day or two to celebrate Christmas. We kissed passionately, not wanting the moment to end.

“Gringo, we go now!” barked the lieutenant. Two police officers led me towards the jeep.

“Paul, I will be there in the morning with breakfast”, shouted Ivonne. I thought, I’m okay; it’s a fuck awful situation, but in a day’s time this will all be over. I will be celebrating Christmas with Ivonne, opening presents, eating, drinking, and dancing.

The jeep started up and fell in line with the other vehicles. The cavalcade snaked its way through the gates and out onto the highway. I looked back at my hacienda and the beautiful woman who had made it home. Would I ever be returning here? At this point there were no certainties, nothing was clear. I would just need to hold onto that picture for the time being and pray to God I would be.

Hemp Conspiracy



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