'He Loved Me, And I Loved Him'

The Great and Sad Story of Phil Graham

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By Katharine Graham

Early in 1940, I was invited by a friend to Sunday lunch with a group at the Ritz Carlton. After we had lunched as long as we could, someone suggested driving to the country, and we spent the

PERSONAL HISTORY

afternoon there. At the end of the day, everyone except Phil Graham and me had engagements, so he asked if I wanted to have dinner. We went to a restaurant, had a long dinner, talked and laughed a lot, and drank until quite late. I found him captivating. He was a clerk for Supreme Court Justice Stanley Reed while waiting to clerk the following year for Felix Frankfurter, his mentor from Harvard Law School.

Phil called me once or twice, and carried on in his usual irreverent, breezy way. The second week in February, he called me at work late one afternoon suggesting that we have dinner at Harvey's, a famous old seafood restaurant next door to the Mayflower, where we could buy the early edition of The Post. I had begun writing so-called light editorials and laying out parts of the editorial page. He would help me proofread.

The evening was fine and fun. Phil drove me home, and we talked for a long time. He told me that he loved me and said we would be married and go to Florida, if I could live with only two dresses, because I had to understand that he would never take anything from my father and we would live on what he made.

My breath was taken away.

It all seems so odd in retrospect. I was charmed and dazzled. And I was incredulous—this brilliant, charismatic, fascinating man loved me! Here was someone who combined for me the two parts of my life that I thought were inescapably separate.

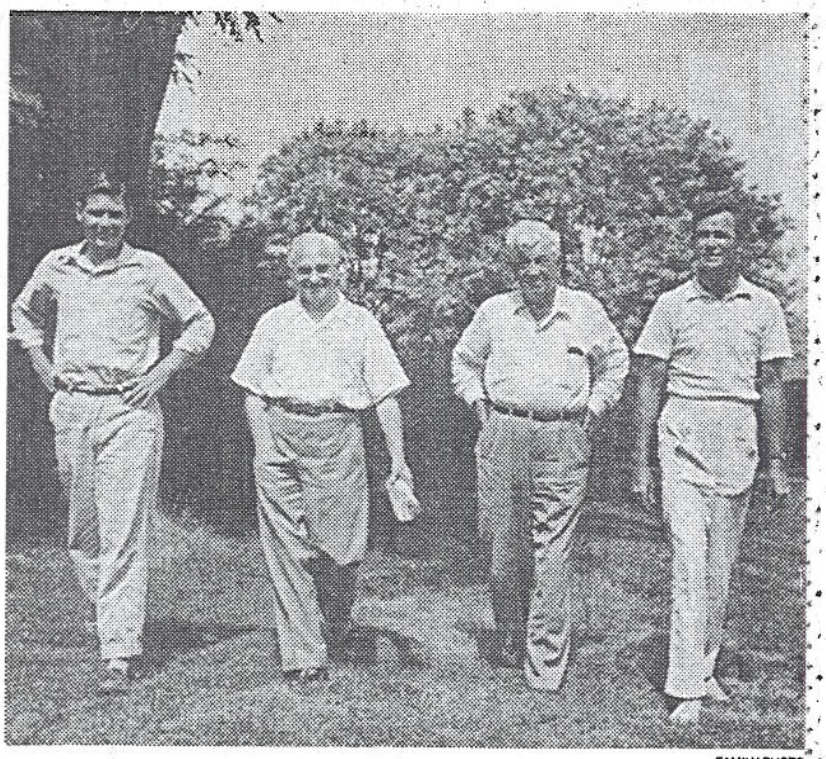
See GRAHAM, C6, Col. 1

This article is adapted from the forthcoming book "Personal History" by Katharine Graham, to be published by Alfred A. Knopf.

BY EDWARD STEICHEN, REPRINTED BY PERMISSION OF JOANNA T. STEICHEN

A June wedding: Philip and Katharine Graham married in 1940. They met earlier that year.

BY VYTAS VALAITIS—NEWSWEEK



FAMILY PHOTO

Katharine and Phil Graham in 1962, left, after The Post purchased Artnews; above, from left, Phil's half brother Bob Graham, Felix Frankfurter, Ernest Graham and Phil Graham in 1955.

GRAHAM, From C1

For the first time I had found a man who was that right mix of intellectual, physical, and social charm, and warm and funny on top of that. Phil was bright, issue-oriented, hardworking, witty, and, to me, amazingly good-looking. He loved me, and I loved him. It was incredibly exciting.

The Formative Years

Phil was born in 1915 in Terry, S.D., and moved as a boy to the Everglades, where his father, Ernest Graham, was manager of a sugar cane plantation. The area was still a wilderness. The only other inhabitants were Seminole Indians. After a hurricane struck in 1926, the sugar company gave up and his father developed a dairy business on some of the land. Mainly, the Grahams were poor and had a difficult struggle.

Phil went to school in Miami. Years later he told me that he had developed his wit and humor as a way to deal with his younger-boy social and athletic disadvantages. He acknowledged that he used humor as a weapon with which to keep people at a distance.

In college at the University of Florida, Phil enjoyed fraternity life, and girls, and he drank a good deal of bathtub gin. In 1934, when Phil was 19, his mother died of cancer—he later confessed that he had cried himself to sleep night after night in college. Phil's mother had discussed her desire that he go to law school. She'd been told that Harvard was the best, so her dying wish was that he go there.

At Harvard, Phil made the Law Review and, at the end of his second year, became its president. So much of his life flowed from the year as president of the Law Review. It introduced him to Felix Frankfurter. Felix adopted Phil as one of his "boys" before he was appointed by President Roosevelt to the Supreme Court. It was with Felix that Phil entered the world of great minds, ideas and books, stimulating conversation, and above all an interest in current events.

Simple Pleasures

Telling his father about the marriage proved difficult. Phil wrote him on March 17, 1940, in his nervousness misspelling my name:

"I am going to get married. . . . Her name is Katherine Meyer and I've not a doubt in the world that you'll love her. You've probably heard of her father, Eugene Meyer, who is now publisher of the Washington Post, and has been in the past such things as head of the Federal Reserve. . . . He is a Jew, a Republican, and rich as hell. . . . This is about enough to mention about the family except possibly to reemphasize that they are lousy rich—for instance, they live in an absurdly huge vulgar castle here, have another in N.Y., have a ranch in Wyoming, etc. . . .

"We have worked out this solution: we'll live in the sort of house, have the sort of furniture, eat the sort of food, go to the sort of places, that young people making salaries like mine can afford."

After the honeymoon, we settled into our little house, which we rented for $80 a month in a pleasant neighborhood called Burleith. Phil was earning $3,600 a year as a law clerk. I was earning about $1,500 a year. We had one small cushion, a $500 wedding present from an aunt, which I thought I would use for extras like theater and travel tickets. I began keeping a little accounts book, dutifully noting every penny spent, including the cost of gas and oil for the car, stamps, groceries, even our personal allowances, which were $9 each per week. Except for the $500 present, I never used a cent of my own until two years later, when Phil went into the Army.

Those first few years of marriage, Phil and I had a very happy time. I grew up considerably, mostly thanks to him. He counterbalanced my ingrown resistance to new and different ideas, and to people with whom I didn't agree politically. Phil also brought into my life more laughter, gaiety, irreverence for rules, and originality.

Despite his early apprehensions about my father's wealth, politics, and possible impulse to control, Phil gradually grew very close to him. Phil and my mother also got along well. But he always insisted that we lead our own lives. He refused to be used, particularly by my mother, or to be dominated by her.

But, always, it was he who decided and I who responded. It wasn't until years later that I looked at the downside of all this and realized that, perversely, I had seemed to enjoy the role of doormat wife.

Signing On to The Post

In the fall of 1942, Dad and I were on a train coming back from New York, and naturally we were talking about Phil. I remember his commenting on how well Phil wrote and how much he'd like to have him work for The Washington Post. Shortly after this, my father seems to have brought up with both of us the possibility of Phil's working at the paper after the war. Certainly he saw his whole endeavor as useless unless he could project a future for The Post in the family. In those days, of course, the only possible heir would have been a male, and since my brother was in medicine and had shown little or no interest in the business, my father naturally thought of Phil. It never crossed my mind that he might have viewed me as someone to take on an important job at the paper.

After much talk, consultation, and soul-searching, Phil finally decided to accept. On Jan. 1, 1946, he started his postwar work at the age of 30 as associate publisher of The Post. My father had said that he himself was too old to let Phil work his way up. Though Phil knew nothing about the newspaper business—or any business, for that

"Phil received the larger share of the stock because, as Dad explained to me, no man should be in the position of working for his wife."

—Katharine Graham

matter—his brains and abilities served him well. At once he became my father's close collaborator.

Then, in June 1946, President Truman called and asked my father to become the first president of the World Bank. So, on June 18, 1946, The Post announced that my father was withdrawing from active direction of the paper. Phil would be publisher in title and in fact. He was one month shy of his 31st birthday, the youngest publisher of a major newspaper in America.

He had come into a job for which he was ill-prepared. He was in charge of a losing newspaper in what was rapidly becoming the capital of the world. Indeed, the paper was still struggling for its life.

Phil's early memoranda to his executives are stunning in their detailed outline of problems, potential, and objectives. He knew everyone in the building, always taking on the problems of people who worked for him—worrying over someone's sick child, unmet mortgage payment, health crisis. He began actively recruiting young people with potential, as well as more established reporters and editors. And he was very interested in ensuring that women were working on the paper as well as reading it.

"Very complicated business, a newspaper," Phil noted in a letter to my father late in 1947.

By mid-1948, The Post was still a rocky, if lively, paper. Around this time, my father decided to pass the paper on to Phil and me. Phil received the larger share of the stock because, as Dad explained to me, no man should be in the position of working for his wife. Curiously I was in complete accord with this idea.

To help Phil pay back the debt he incurred in borrowing to buy the stock, I volunteered to pay for all our living expenses—houses, cars, schools, entertainment—and did so. Everything except Phil's personal expenses was carried by me from the modest trust started for each of the Meyer children by my father. This arrangement was never an issue. Only 15 years later, when things were very bad, did I look at the situation ruefully.

The Young Publisher

In many ways, Phil was at his very best as a publisher in these years. He sparked ideas, praised and persuaded, criticized and cajoled. He was acutely aware of the dilemma that arose from the fact that, as he put it, "a newspaper must be a successful commercial enterprise in order to survive. Yet, the publisher must realize that he has obligations which transcend any commercial interest."

Phil often involved The Post in righting wrongs, as he saw them. In his first, brief tenure at The Post, Ben Bradlee was deeply distressed by the side of Phil that used the paper to achieve his political purposes, however worthy. In 1949, riots were taking place, as members of the Progressive Party led black children to swim in Washington's previously all-white public swimming pools. The violence grew steadily. In one case, there were 200 whites arrayed against an equal number of blacks—with Park Police on horses in the middle. Ben, with another reporter, was on the site for 36 straight hours. The reporters returned to The Post to write the story, expecting, of course, that it would be on the front page. Instead, it appeared on Page B7.

In the process of blowing his stack, as only he could do, Ben felt a tap on his shoulder and turned to find Phil, who said, "Okay, buster, come with me," and led the way to his office. Around the table in Phil's office sat Secretary of the Interior Julius "Cap" Krug, Undersecretary Oscar Chapman, President Truman's special adviser Clark Clifford, and two or three others. Phil then cut a deal. The story would run on the front page of The Post unless the people with the power to do something about it integrated the pools.

This was a typical example of the way Phil used power to accomplish something good. It worked, but at the same time it hurt the paper. To keep a story out of the paper to achieve a purpose, even a fine one, is neither appropriate nor in the spirit of my father's definition of the duty of a newspaper: "To try to tell the truth. To find it out and tell it."

Ups and Downs

Phil suffered from numerous illnesses, increasingly so as the years went by. There were moments of strain between us, mostly when he drank too much, after which—almost inevitably—a rather violent quarrel would ensue, followed by abject apologies and diminished drinking, or even a temporary period of no drinking at all.

Nonetheless, Phil was the fizz in our lives. He was the fun at the dinner table and in our country life. He had the ideas, the jokes, the games. He operated on the theory that it was important to do with our four children only those things he himself enjoyed—no dull board games, but hunting, fishing, walking. Everything rotated around him, and I willingly participated in keeping him at the center of things.

At the beginning of 1954, an event occurred that led up to what I still think of as the defining moment for the company: the unexpected acquisition of the Times-Herald [the other morning paper in Washington]. My father received a confidential letter from his friend Kent Cooper, former general manager of the Associated Press, who was living in retirement in Palm Beach.

The message was that Col. Robert McCormick [the newspaper baron who had purchased the Times-Herald five years before] wanted $8.5 million for the paper. My father said, "Done." We now had the morning field in Washington to ourselves. At last, we could begin to believe that The Post was here to stay.

Mixing Politics

I'm not sure what triggered Phil's relationship with Lyndon Baines Johnson, but it now seems predictable, even foreordained. Johnson worked actively to cultivate the press, and Phil was always drawn to politics. They both loved power and its use for what they thought of as desirable purposes. They were both from the South. Both were full of humor—with an edge. They had a natural affinity.

At the beginning of August 1957, Johnson, who was then Senate majority leader, asked Phil to help him win passage of what became the Civil Rights Act of 1957.

Phil's involvement in the whole matter—besides pushing Lyndon on its importance from the beginning of their relationship—began in earnest in July, when he invited [civil rights lawyer] Joe Rauh to our farm in Virginia, Glen Welby. Phil's invitations often came in the form of commands, and this was one. He needed Joe's help because Joe had a solid relationship with the black leadership in the country, especially Roy Wilkins, then executive secretary

of the NAACP.

Phil asked Joe to bring Felix Frankfurter along. Both Phil and Felix worked on Joe throughout our dinner, suggesting that the most important first step for the 1950s was the right to vote. [Rauh favored a much broader civil rights bill, but the Senate had watered it down.] Now I can see how extraordinary—and out of order—it was for a Supreme Court justice to be stepping over the boundaries to this extent, but I didn't then. It was very much in Felix's nature, and he was dealing with two men—Phil and Joe—to whom he was as close as though they were his sons.

Sometime after the "brainwashing" party, Johnson urged Phil to be at his side during the final push for passage of the bill. So Phil returned to Washington and stayed with Lyndon almost constantly for several days, working day and night.

In the end, Joe and his like-minded friends bought Phil's argument that this bill was better than nothing. The whole strategy for going for voting rights was inspired—the idea for which Phil was the architect.

Perhaps if the turmoil had ended there he might have been able to rest and get his strength back. Instead, just a month later, Arkansas Gov. Orval Faubus ordered the National Guard to bar nine Negro students from the previously all-white Central High School in Little Rock. The next step in the battle for civil rights was on.

Since Eisenhower was not very interested, except in theory, and was concentrating on his vacation golf games, there was a vacuum within the administration. Into this vacuum, Phil moved swiftly and with great assurance.

Believing that he knew enough of the key players that he could solve the problem with behind-the-scenes maneuvering, he kept several phones going day and night. When Eisenhower finally sent in federal troops, Phil saw it as a defeat not only for the South but for himself.

Phil's activities in regard to Little Rock were the first sign for me that something was wrong with him, that his powerful talents could be used in such an idealistic but confusing and irrational way. His health, already frail, was affected physically and mentally. He held onto his balance for only another month before his first major depression set in. On Oct. 28, in the middle of the night, he broke. He wept and wept and couldn't stop. He said he felt trapped, no longer able to go on; that everything was black. We were both up all night, with me trying desperately but to no avail to be of some reassuring help.

It was all kept very private; our one idea was to conceal what had happened not only from the world but from our friends, my family, and even our children. As a result, I had no one on whom to lean for advice. Still, I believed that with enough rest he'd recover and we'd go on.

Most of the year following Phil's breakdown was spent in slow, gradual recovery. He had all the symptoms of severe depression—overwhelming doubt about himself and his abilities, a desire to seclude himself from the world, indecision even about what pair of shoes to wear, guilt, and occasional talk of suicide. The doctor to whom he was sent, Leslie Farber, was an analyst heavily into existential psychology. It was he who instilled in Phil a distrust, fear, and horror of any drugs, not to mention shock therapy, claiming that these treatments reduced people to something less than human—something tranquilized and fish-like. In addition, Farber believed that labeling something, giving a name to a disorder, changed how the patient viewed himself and was viewed by those around him. Because of this, he never put a name to Phil's illness. I didn't hear the term "manic-depression" until some years later.

For nearly a year, Phil went to the office hardly at all. But by the summer of 1958, he was starting to do a little more. Much of his activity was related to politics. He stepped up his connection to Lyndon Johnson.

See GRAHAM, C7, Col. 1

GRAHAM, From C6

Renewed Activity

The whole political year of 1960 was very exciting. Early on, Phil predicted that Kennedy and Johnson would be the only candidates to come into the Democratic Convention with sizable blocs of delegates. On July 5, Johnson held a press conference at which he announced his candidacy. Phil, who had been helping him prepare for this moment for months, was at his side working on his statement. He ended up on his hands and knees, crawling around at the last minute to retrieve one of Lyndon's contact lenses.

Phil and I flew to California five days before the Democratic Convention was to open. I was already committed to Kennedy. Phil remained loyal to Johnson until he lost the bid for the nomination. At that point, Phil got together with [columnist] Joe Alsop to discuss the merits of Lyndon Johnson as Kennedy's running mate. Joe persuaded Phil to accompany him to urge Kennedy to offer the vice-presidency to Johnson.

When they were taken to see JFK, Phil spoke—"shrewdly and eloquently," according to Joe—pointing out all the obvious things that Johnson could add to the ticket and noting that not having Johnson on the ticket would certainly be trouble.

Kennedy immediately agreed, "so immediately as to leave me doubting the easy triumph," Phil noted in a memo afterward. "So I restated the matter urging him not to count on Johnson's turning it down . . . ."

Early Thursday morning, Kennedy called Johnson, waking him up and making an appointment to see him a little later. At that meeting he offered him the vice-presidency—both because he thought he had to and because he thought that Johnson would not accept. Kennedy went back to his headquarters and, according to Arthur Schlesinger in "Robert Kennedy and His Times," told Bobby, "You just won't believe it. He wants it."

Phil had been right.

By early March 1961, Phil was involved in his old in-depth way with many activities—political and Post Co.-related—and he seemed to me to be enjoying himself. I can see today that his activities had become increasingly frenetic, though still fairly constructively so, the most obvious example of which was his purchase of Newsweek, then a weak, marginally profitable newsmagazine for businessmen, far behind its rival, Time.

The deal took only about three weeks from beginning to end, during which time he slept very little and rode a high crest, working feverishly to get it done. The whole idea of buying Newsweek and adding yet another huge responsibility to his already too-full plate made me nervous. On the other hand, some of our long talks over the past few years had made it apparent to me that Phil was worried about being a "son-in-law," about having been "given" the paper

UNDATED FILE PHOTO/THE WASHINGTON POST

Phil Graham, as publisher of The Washington Post, often involved the paper in righting wrongs, as he saw them.

siasm and natural energy—so much so that at one of the parties his pants split horizontally across the rear.

In October 1962, Phil accepted an invitation from President Kennedy to serve as an incorporator of the Communications Satellite Corp., known as COMSAT, with the understanding that he would be elected to head it. COMSAT was a groundbreaking public/private organization, half government, half telephone company. Getting it launched was a full-time job, requiring massive organizational skills, infinite tact and patience, and a huge amount of time and energy. It was not what Phil needed at that time, but it was what he wanted—an irresistible temptation to be engaged in an exciting venture that would, in fact, alter the shape of the world.

Phil began to look for a chairman for COMSAT and turned to our friend Gen. Lauris Norstad, who was soon to retire as supreme allied commander in Europe. Phil also wanted Frank Stanton, still CBS president, to become COMSAT's president and operating head.

On Nov. 2, I flew up to Idlewild Airport with Phil to see him off to Europe, where he was going to talk to Larry Norstad. Early the next day, Phil and Larry in Paris both wrote letters to Stanton. Phil felt such urgency about coopting Stanton that he decided to send a personal messenger to ensure that the letters reached Frank in New York.

The appearance of this messenger, a Newsweek stringer whose name was Robin Webb, was the beginning of the tragic end.

That Christmas Eve afternoon, the world I had known and loved ended for me. The phone rang and I picked it up, not realizing that Phil, too, had picked it up, in his dressing room, with the door shut. I heard Phil and Robin talking to each other in words that made the situation plain.

It's hard to describe my devastation after my discovery of the affair. My feeling that something fundamental had been destroyed was a result of my total commitment and my belief that these feelings went both ways. Also, it was part of my bafflement at what I saw as Phil's increasingly strange behavior. I had no understanding of the terrible depression he had gone through or the polar-opposite mood that was dominating him at the time.

Phil was clearly upset, too. He told me that he wanted to preserve our marriage and our family; he said that he loved Robin but would tell her the affair was over, and that he would stay with his family.

At some point, however, not quite three weeks after Christmas Eve, the phones started to work again between Phil and Robin. By this time, Robin had returned to Paris. Phil called and told her to come back to America as soon as she could. He welcomed her with a carload of flowers, and together they flew to Sioux Falls, S.D., where he was to talk to the publisher of the local paper about buying it.

From Sioux Falls, Phil and Robin flew to Phoenix, where many of the nation's most prominent publishers were gathered for a meeting of the Associated Press. Otis Chandler and his wife, Missy, met Phil and Robin at the airport. According to Otis, who told me all of this only much later, Phil was disheveled and spinning out ideas, some of which were unintelligible. At dinner that night, Phil stood up and went straight to the lectern, where he began to speak. His remarks quickly degenerated, turning into nonsense interspersed with ugly language.

Nobody knew what to do. Finally, Otis and some other men got him to his room. Someone—I've never been sure who—reached President Kennedy, who agreed to the use of a government plane to transport the doctors to get Phil.

I gather Dr. Farber initially tried to read him passages from Martin Buber, and when this failed to work, they forcibly tranquilized him and put him on the plane. Robin was sent away with too little care or attention. When the plane landed in Washington, he was taken first to George Washington University Hospital and later to Chestnut Lodge, a private mental hospital in a suburb of Washington. Phil viewed this whole sequence of events, with some reason, as a violation of his rights and civil liberties. As he was being taken out of George Washington, he loudly proclaimed who he was and that he was a prisoner.

The Downfall

On Feb. 1, Phil came home briefly. However, on Feb. 4, he traveled to New York and went straight to Idlewild, where he met Robin once more. This time, he saw his departure as final. Phil firmly stated his intention to divorce me and marry Robin.

Phil knew he controlled The Post because my father had given him the majority of A shares. He felt he owned it because he had worked for 17 years to make it a success, so from his point of view the paper was his. In some ways, this was the bottom moment for me—very confusing, very difficult, and very painful. Not only had I lost my husband but I was about to lose The Post.

I had to face facts—Phil was really gone. He had left me for good, and it was almost more than I could bear. My feelings about The Post, however, were very clear. My father had indeed given Phil the major part of the stock, and Phil had run the company well, but it was the millions invested in the paper by my father that enabled it to survive the years of losses. It was my paying all our living expenses that had allowed Phil to purchase his stock with his income from The Post. I was not about to give up the paper without a fight.

[But a fight was unnecessary. Five months later, Phil Graham, once again in a trough of depression, ended the affair and came home.]

Having Phil back was a tremendous—and tremendously complicated—relief. Almost pathetically, he asked not to go back to Chestnut Lodge. In the end he went sadly but willingly, late in the day on June 20.

He remained seriously depressed but seemed to me to be quite noticeably better, even after only a week or so at Chestnut Lodge. I felt he finally had doctors who were treating a real and known illness.

Phil very much wanted to go to Glen Welby for a break from the hospital, and had started to work on the doctors to obtain their permission. One doctor told a friend later, "Phil was determined to get out and really was unbelievably masterful in his ability to manipulate people." He even got the patients to take a vote among themselves. Naturally, they voted that he be allowed to go.

On Saturday, Aug. 3, Phil's driver picked him up at Chestnut Lodge, and then they came to R Street to get me. We had lunch on two trays on the back porch at Glen Welby, chatting and listening to some classical records. After lunch, we went upstairs to our bedroom for a nap. After a short while, Phil got up, saying he wanted to lie down in a separate bedroom he sometimes used. Only a few minutes later, there was the ear-splitting noise of a gun going off indoors. I bolted out of the room and ran around in a frenzy looking for him. When I opened the door to a downstairs bathroom, I found him.

He left no note of any kind. I believe that Phil came to the sad conclusion that he would never again lead a normal life. I also think that he realized the illness would recur. I think he felt he'd done such harm the last time around that he just couldn't deal with it, couldn't fix everything. It was unendurable to him not only that he couldn't make any of it right but that he might cause more hurt again.

Tomorrow: Watergate.

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