

DELETED SCENES: AWAKEN THE DAWN

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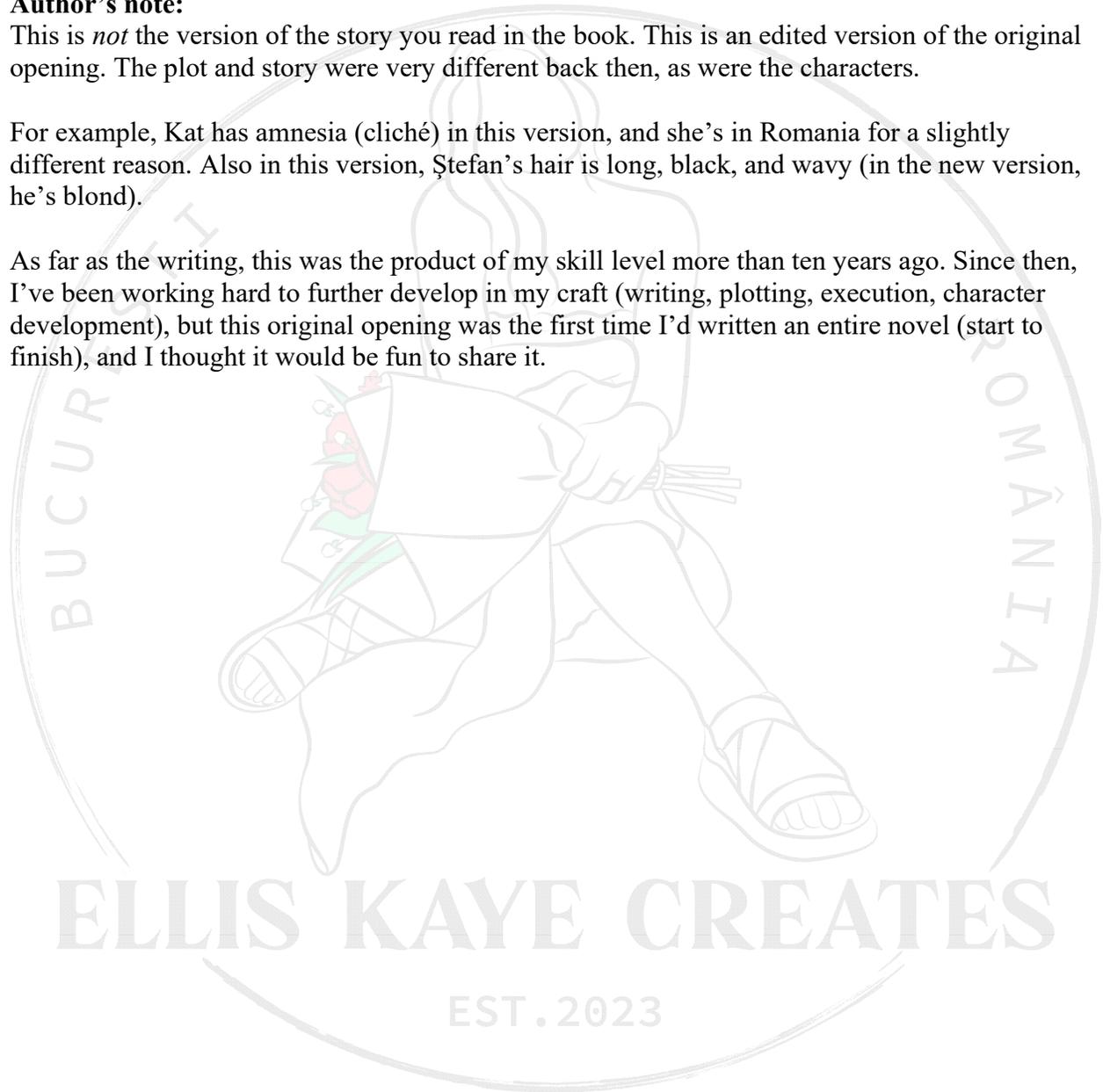
Scene: Original opening (before the manuscript underwent major revisions)

Author's note:

This is *not* the version of the story you read in the book. This is an edited version of the original opening. The plot and story were very different back then, as were the characters.

For example, Kat has amnesia (cliché) in this version, and she's in Romania for a slightly different reason. Also in this version, Ștefan's hair is long, black, and wavy (in the new version, he's blond).

As far as the writing, this was the product of my skill level more than ten years ago. Since then, I've been working hard to further develop in my craft (writing, plotting, execution, character development), but this original opening was the first time I'd written an entire novel (start to finish), and I thought it would be fun to share it.



Chapter 1 – Amnesia

The mist swirled. I breathed it in, swallowing it—a fog so thick it filled my mouth and smothered my lungs. I couldn't move.

What's wrong with me? I've never been this drunk before. Ever.

I cursed the tequila, then myself for drinking it, before my mind gave way to blackness.

#

Bang! Thud-thud! Clang!

The noise jarred me awake. I sat up with a sharp gasp and found myself on the ground surrounded by trash cans.

What's going on? Where am I? And what's that smell? The stench of rotten food invaded my nostrils until I tasted the odor. My stomach churned.

That was when I realized I was in an alley. *Why* I was in an alley, and where exactly that alley was, I didn't know.

I teetered between conscious and comatose until another crash jarred me out of the daze. Someone was in the alley with me, and I debated what to do. Should I run? Play dead?

A subsequent noise—swishy, like plastic—soon followed. Sounded like the person was sifting through a garbage bag.

I twisted around, readying myself to jump up, when a *meow* bounced off the walls. It wasn't a person. It was a cat.

In that moment, this was the only thing I felt sure about. Sweat broke across my brow as I searched my brain for a logical explanation. I didn't find one, not even the recollection of my own name. And how had I ended up in this alley? Was I drunk? Had I passed out next to a bar?

The ideas seemed plausible, although I didn't know why. Did I even drink? How old was I?

“And where the hell am I?” The sound of my voice, unrecognizable, made me shudder.

I pushed myself to standing and noticed pain in my left wrist and elbow. My right knee ached, and my head throbbed. I didn't remember getting injured.

Then again, I didn't remember anything.

I hobbled toward an adjacent sidewalk and stumbled over a trashcan lying in the walkway. My hands went out to brace myself, and my injured wrist took the brunt of it.

“Ouch. *Ouch!*” A necklace had fallen out of my shirt and whacked me in the forehead. I had seen the fall coming, but I hadn't expected to get smacked by a rock-on-a-chain.

Annoyed, I stuffed the necklace into my shirt and shoved the trashcan aside.

I stepped onto the dimly lit sidewalk and took in my surroundings. Clouds cast a shadow over the street, making it difficult to see even with the sprinkling of streetlamps.

I strained my eyes, scanning, and noticed street signs. Accent marks and strange comma-like symbols fringed the lettering. The signs were written in a foreign language.

“Or maybe I've forgotten how to read, too,” I muttered.

I gave a quick shake of my head and then peered inside the ramshackle building on my left. Vacant.

A smaller building stood next door. I pressed my face to the window, and dust coated my skin. Cobwebs and absolutely nothing else filled the place.

Poorly maintained power lines crisscrossed the road. One wire sagged to the ground, while two of the poles looked like they might topple over any second; a dangerous buzz emitted from that direction.

A tall cyclone fence enclosed a field. I approached the fence and peered into the darkness. There was nothing. No buildings. No signs of life.

The thought of being alone was unbearable. Not a single soul ventured about on this street, and I didn't know which way to go for help.

As if Lady Luck wished to prove her existence, I heard the shuffling of feet scurrying somewhere nearby. A man emerged from the shadows, heading for a parked car down the street.

Thank God.

“Excuse me!” I jogged toward the man, hand raised. “Hey!”

A burst of expletives stopped me in my tracks—at least, they sounded like expletives. He was yelling in a foreign language, and although I couldn’t understand him, his harsh tone convinced me he was swearing.

He stared me down while he crossed to his car. Did he think I wanted to steal something from him? His wallet, maybe? His car?

There were no other cars on the street, and I realized my soon-to-be predicament if he left. “Please don’t go!” I said as he dropped into the driver’s seat. “Wait!” I ran forward.

He started the car, gunned the motor, and whipped onto the road. His taillights disappeared before I could blink.

Discouragement came crashing down. I stared after the man as every bit of strength drained from my legs. “Where *am* I?” I screamed.

My voice dispelled, and an eerie silence descended. I collapsed to the ground, tears gushing. “Why can’t I remember?”

It took several minutes, and several deep breaths, before I gathered my fractured wits and pieced them back together. I needed to find help and decided to head in the same direction as the car.

Focus. All you have to do is find one person to help you. Just one. But where would that one person be? *Keep moving. You’re bound to run into someone.*

But what if I didn’t? What if I was going the wrong way? I shouldn’t have let that man go. I should have forced him to listen.

Suddenly, I heard that same familiar sound I’d heard a moment ago. I had to be

imagining it... right?

No, I definitely heard it. Someone was coming this way. This time, the footsteps were hard and clunky—a pair of boots stomping across the sidewalk.

The footsteps rolled closer.

Through the dim light, I construed the vague outline of a man; he nearly blended into the night with his all-black attire. He tucked his hands in his pockets and lifted his stare from the sidewalk to me.

I waved.

He stopped under a streetlamp, head tilted. His confusion dissolved into something reminiscent of—what was it? Fear?

No, it was recognition. The guy knew me.

“Hey,” I called out. “I... need help.” *Please let him speak English.*

His eyes widened. Why? Had I been missing for a long time? Maybe so. Maybe seeing me again surprised him.

I took another step. He countered with a step back.

“Wait,” I said.

He turned, tripping over himself, and bolted into the darkness.

“Wait!” I broke into a sprint.

He made a left. At least five seconds lapsed before I made the same turn. This road was darker than the last one, and the moon offered a weak, milky light through the clouds. I barely detected the man’s shadowy figure as he made another left up ahead.

I raced up the street, legs wobbly as they carried me over cobblestones, and darted past drab block-style industrial buildings.

Six, seven—I wasn’t sure how many buildings I had passed before I stopped, out of breath and puzzled. So far, there hadn’t been any crossroads. So then, where had the guy made

that last turn?

My eyes settled on a warehouse, then on... an alley. It was similar to the one I'd found myself in earlier, except this one was cluttered with junk. Scrap metal, rolled up fencing, and barbed wire lay strewn about. Broken glass caught a hint of hazy moonlight.

"Hello? Are you in there?" I poked my head inside the alley. Had I been in a better state of mind, I might have let this go, let *him* go. But the feeling of abandonment devastated me to the core, and that flash of recognition I'd seen on face drove me well past the realm of this-is-dangerous.

Currently, I was in this-is-totally-freaking-crazy territory.

I wondered if the alley might lead to an adjacent street. That would have explained how the guy had ditched me so easily. I entered, expecting to find that kind of cut-through, but found myself face to face with a brick wall instead.

I shook my head, defeated, and turned to exit the alley—and that was when I noticed a boarded-up door on my left. The boards were horizontal, which wasn't particularly unusual, but upon closer inspection, I noticed a shorter, vertical board much different from the others.

I trailed my hand over it. Someone had secured the board at its center instead of at each end. I gave it a jiggle.

The board moved.

I grunted, turning the board counter-clockwise until it lay flat like the others. The sound of metal-against-metal sliced through the alley as a large bolt contracted from the door frame.

The door creaked open, revealing a room. It was empty apart from a wooden table, a metal shelf, and a flickering light hanging from the ceiling.

"This can't be right." The room was tiny compared to the building, and it didn't lead anywhere. Just a room with four walls.

It could have been a storage room, although it wasn't being used for much at the moment,

and the guy I'd been chasing definitely wasn't in here.

What if this place belonged to the first man I'd seen, the one who had cussed me out in the foreign language? He could have moved his stuff somewhere and that was why he'd been out here so late. He'd even left the light on in his rush to leave.

That must be it.

As I stood there, I wondered if the storage room, so cozy and lit, might be the best place to stay until morning. I didn't stand a chance at finding the other guy. He was probably ten streets away by now.

A shiver rippled through me. My list of bad experiences had reached two since I'd woken up, and I wasn't going to let it reach three.

I ducked inside the room and locked myself inside using a lever on the door. The bolt slid into place, and I let myself exhale deeply. I'd be safe here overnight. Definitely safer than I would have been on the streets.

"What is this?" A man's voice cloaked in a heavy accent came from behind me.

I spun around and backed myself against the door. Sickness washed over me and settled in my stomach.

A man stood across the room. This wasn't the young guy I'd been chasing, and it wasn't the man who'd cussed me out. He was tall, lanky, with long black hair and a trimmed beard.

His hostile expression held steady as he spoke again, this time in a foreign language that perfectly matched his accent. I gauged my options for escape... but I couldn't get past the fact that he'd appeared out of thin air.

Thirty seconds ago, I'd been alone, and there'd been no place this man could have been hidden. Even the table was thin, flimsy, nothing that could have concealed him. The door behind me was the only way in or out.

My head intuitively turned toward the door.

“Do not try to run,” he warned.

“Run?” I acted like I hadn’t thought of such a thing.

He walked forward and grabbed my arm. “Do you think we are stupid?”

“Don’t hurt me! I’m sorry!”

“You will be sorry.”

My adrenaline surged. I gave him a hard shove, and he staggered into the wall. I raced to the door and gripped the lever.

He swooped down on me, a hawk bearing down on its prey, and threw me to the floor. My body hit first, then my head. Blackness seeped into my vision, followed by the pulse of tiny stars.

He grabbed me again and jerked me to my feet. With a loud grunt he tossed me against the wall. I slammed into it and ricocheted off before slumping to the floor.

The man stared with a wicked grin. Only one of him stood there, but the one turned into two, and two turned into three.

Nausea hit me. The room vibrated and then spun, and I slipped into a dark oblivion.

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EST. 2023

Chapter 2 – Run

A man’s voice, garbled by some mechanical device, drifted to me. “Drago?”

“*Da,*” my captor said.

A buzz followed. I moved but not on my own, like I was floating—no, being carried. Blackness beat down on me as blood rushed to my head.

I forced my eyes open and found myself upside-down, tossed across the man’s shoulders. He was carrying me down a stairwell, and a musty odor wafted over me.

He stepped off the last stair, and a cement floor stretched around his feet. The inside of a warehouse came into view around us.

Wake up! Fight him off! My body refused to cooperate.

We came to a stop, and my captor spoke—not to me, but to someone else in the room. “Andrei was not competent enough to apprehend her, so I did the job for him.”

“Shut up, Drago!” someone said. He sounded young—early teens at most—and he didn’t have an accent.

“Come now, Drago, don’t be too proud of yourself,” said a third person. His voice was deep and rich, his tone smug. “You overpowered a seventeen-year-old girl. It’s not exactly commendable.”

My captor replied in the foreign language. The arrogant guy shot back, also in that language, and my captor tensed, barking something in response.

“Enough. All of you,” a fourth voice said. “Set her down.”

My captor leaned forward until I slid off his shoulders. My feet touched the ground, and the whole world wobbled. I crumpled like a piece of tissue paper.

A chair grated against the floor and toppled over. “Drago, you moron!” the man yelled. Sounded like the arrogant man again.

“Quiet, Maksim. Drago, pick her up.”

Who were all these men? What were they going to do to me?

My captor tugged on my limp body until I sat upright. My vision came into focus under a beam of bright light. I squinted, shielding my eyes.

“Welcome back.”

I managed to see past the blinding light and found a blur of three men—one sitting, two standing—all staring at me.

“You left us so quickly last time,” the man continued. “We did not have a chance to say goodbye. Tell me, where have you been?”

My hand went up to my head. The throbbing intensified, my eyes tender under the bright light. “I-I don’t remember.”

The man chuckled. “Why is it that you do not remember?”

“I suppose if I remembered I could tell you.” My sarcasm bit him, and his grin fell away.

“You certainly have not lost your charm,” he said with a frown.

I blinked, trying to clear my vision, and forced myself to get a good look at the men. The first was the guy I’d been chasing. He wore a fitted leather jacket with dark pants, and his alarmed expression remained as he watched the man who’d been speaking to me.

That man—the one still seated—had messy, stringy hair that flowed down to his chin.

Rebel strands had fallen out of place and into his eyes, giving him a haphazard look—and yet, with a confidence that radiated in all directions.

He was the leader of their group. Somehow, I just knew.

The third man was the one who'd toppled his chair. He stood slouched, posture rigid, his hands resting on his hips. He wore a ring on every finger—mostly decorative bands, but one featured a huge onyx.

His attention shifted to me. Our gazes met, and he looked away.

The leader followed my stare to the guy, and I felt a dire urge to say something. “Do you know who I am?” I blurted.

“What do you expect from us?” the leader said, his attention returning to me. “That all is forgiven? Or should I say that all is forgotten?”

“I don't understand what you mean.”

“It is funny how you Americans believe. You lie and then lie to cover up the lie.”

So I was American. That was a start.

“I'm not lying,” I said. “I can't even remember my name.”

My captor, Drago, stood behind me. He kicked, landing his boot against my back.

I grunted, snapping forward, and twisted around to face him. “How do you know me?” I pushed up. “How could I possibly know any of you?”

The leader rose from his chair.

I backed away. “I-I don't know what you want from me. You must have the wrong person. I swear, I don't know you.”

“You do not remember... anything?” The leader took a step toward me. “Meeting us? The reason you wished to meet us?”

“I can't imagine why I'd want to meet you.”

“What an intriguing turn of events.” He faced my captor. “Take her to... the guest room.”

See to it that she's comfortable.”

My mouth dropped open. I looked at Drago and saw the very same expression on his face. Neither of us moved.

“Do it!” The leader snapped his fingers. “Now!”

Drago grabbed my arm and dragged me toward another part of the building. “W-what are you going to do to me?”

He hauled me through a long corridor. I thrashed, trying to break his grasp. He wrestled me through a doorway and thrust me into a room.

Then he slammed the door. A lock slid into place.

This was clearly not a guest room. In fact, it looked more like a prison cell with a cot pushed against the wall and a washbasin off to the side.

I limped over to the basin and turned the knob. Brown water leaked from the faucet, and I swore, lifting my gaze to a cracked, dirty mirror.

Dark circles ringed the blue eyes of a short girl with a thin, athletic build. Her teeth looked healthy, though not movie star white, and her thick—really thick—curly black hair was shockingly dark compared to her pale skin.

I struggled to remember the girl in the mirror, but nothing about my looks rang a bell. I backed myself against the door, tears welling up.

As my head came to a rest against the wood, I heard raised voices. The men were arguing, and I desperately wanted to open the door and listen.

I reached for the knob. I knew the door was locked—I'd heard the man lock it—but out of sheer frustration, I tried anyway.

The knob twisted.

I tugged, and the door moved. Not enough to open, but enough to make me think it wasn't locked. But... I'd heard him lock it.

I inspected the door. The wood was warped, off-alignment from the doorframe, and I could see where the lock had been engaged—but not all the way.

I grabbed the knob and tugged again, harder. The door moved again, the lock scraping the frame. I yanked, and the door swung open.

I gasped, waiting for someone to come charging in. No one did.

The voices grew louder as I slipped out of the room and tip-toed up the long corridor. “Where the hell is your head?” came an angry voice.

“What did you want me to do? Search for a blindfold before apprehending her?” This voice belonged to Drago. “She would have escaped!”

“We’ll be lucky if she has not already gone to the police. Keeping her here is inviting trouble we don’t need.” This sounded like the arrogant man.

“The police are not a concern.” I recognized the leader’s bland tone. They were talking about me. And this really was a kidnapping.

My knees went weak as the epiphany hit me. I needed to find a way out of here.

Several doors lined the corridor. I tried the nearest one—locked. Next one—locked. Third one—same thing. I had nowhere to go but back to my prison cell.

There has to be another way.

I moved to the end of the corridor and peeked around the corner. The four men convened on the right side of the room. Straight ahead, a door took shape on the far side of the warehouse.

The argument continued. “Enough with the insults,” Drago barked. “It is Andrei who should be receiving your disapproval.”

The arrogant guy snorted. “Blame the girl. Blame Andrei. It’s everyone else’s fault, isn’t it? Never yours.”

“I will kill you, Maksim!”

“Try it.”

Drago lunged. Maksim sidestepped and shoved him into a chair. The wood smashed under Drago's bodyweight.

The young guy, Andrei, rushed forward. The leader held up a hand, stopping him. Everyone's attention was on Drago, who was scrambling to get up. It was now or never.

The cement floor rushed beneath my feet. Everything I passed became a blur, including the men. My eyes stayed fixed on the door ahead, the door to freedom I hoped.

A few seconds passed before the men started yelling at each other and stampeding after me. But I had a head start, and I had already reached the door.

It opened into a stairwell that led upward. I made the ascent two steps at a time until I reached another door. The men clamored into the stairwell while I stood there, racking my brain, deciphering how to open this one. It worked on a pulley system, and I couldn't find the mechanism to unlock it.

Crap! Where is it?

I noticed a switch above my head. I flipped it, and the door silently opened into the room I'd found myself in earlier, the one I'd been planning to spend the night in. I slammed the door and turned around, shocked to discover it simply looked like part of the wall from this side.

The wooden table sat on the other side of the room. I pushed it against the door, then dragged the metal shelf over and toppled it onto the table.

A hard shove from the other side jostled the blockade. Another shove slid both pieces of furniture out of the way.

I fumbled with the lever that unlocked the exit door as the men burst into the room. Drago swooped down on me. I screamed and swung. The punch connected to his jaw with an earsplitting *crunch*.

I winced, shaking out my hand, as he collapsed against the wall. Andrei and Maksim exchanged a surprised look.

“Get her,” the leader called from inside the stairwell.

Fear tore through me. Should I stand my ground or try to run? I didn’t have time to weigh my options before Andrei moved in. I lifted my foot and jammed it forward, nailing him in the gut. He stumbled into the other guy.

Go!

I grabbed the lever and shoved it to the right. The door opened, and I raced into the alley. The leader screamed in the foreign language I’d been hearing. Romanian, I realized—but I wasn’t sure how I suddenly knew that.

My feet carried me out of the alley and onto the adjacent street. Adrenaline burned through my blood, and my stride widened. I couldn’t understand how I was running so fast, but I harnessed the speed that put more and more distance between the men and me.

Or so I thought. Someone was hot on my heels before I reached the next block. “Run,” he whispered.

I didn’t know which one of them had said it, or why, but I felt myself pulling away. The moon glowed, free of the clouds, and I saw what looked like a main street up ahead. Headlights appeared in that direction.

My body went into overdrive.

“I have her!” This was Drago, and he was close. Much closer than I had realized. He grunted, and a force came crashing down on me.

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“Has she told you anything?”

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“Not yet. She claims to have lost her memory.” The line crackled. “Someone may be listening.”

“I shall be brief. Make her remember. I care not how you do it—manipulate her, force it from her. Use any methods necessary to extract the information. When you have it, deal with

her.”

“I need twenty-four hours.”

“Do not forgo any longer than that. And you must, at all costs, adhere to this final instruction.” He paused.

“Go on.”

“Ensure her remains can never be found.”

Why was this scene cut?

The scene was cut because, frankly, the entire book (and its plot) changed. The scene was fun to write, exciting, but the old plot had to go because it wasn't well-structured. When the book changed, this scene got axed.

There've been several openings for different iterations of the book, but this is an edited version of the very first, original opening.

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