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HERO AND LEANDER

FROM THE GREEK OF
MOEBIUS



BY
EDWIN ARNOLD, M.A.

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HERO AND LEANDER.



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HERO AND LEANDER.

FROM THE GREEK OF MUSÆUS.

BY

EDWIN ARNOLD, M.A.

“Ἀλλήλων δ' ἀπόναντο καὶ ἐν πυμάτῳ περ ὀλέθρῳ.”

CASSELL, PETER, & GALPIN,

LONDON, PARIS, AND NEW YORK

1873



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To

ROBERT BROWNING, Esq.,

IN TRIBUTE OF

RESPECT AND ADMIRATION.

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“ Δύχρον, έρωτος άγαλμα, γαμοστόλον άστρον έρωτος.”

HERO AND LEANDER.

—◆—

SING, Muse! the signal lamp gleaming above
That lit the nightly swimmer to his Love ;
The unseen pathway of the silent tide
That bore the bridegroom to his watchful bride ;
The salt-soaked marriage robes, the moist 5
 embrace ;
Abydos' town, and Sestos, Hero's place ;

Longing Leander, on the black waves' crest,
Eying the light that led to Hero's breast ;
Kind light—Love's jewel !—which the mighty Jove
10 Might well have taken to the orbs above,
And set it shining in the spangled sky
To be Love's star of all Heaven's company ;
Seeing it was the planet of their bliss,
The glittering summons to the sleepless kiss, }
15 Till the hard tempest ended him and this :
Help, then, high Muse ! and teach me how to sing
Leander's death, and lamp's extinguishing.

18 Sestos and white Abydos—cities twain—
Fronted each other over Helle's main ;
And there God Eros, setting notch to string,
Wounded two bosoms with one shaft-shooting,
A maiden's and a youth's—Leander he,
23 And lovely Hero, Sestos' sweetest, she ;

She of her town, and he of his the boast ;
25 A noble pair! If ever to that coast
Thou wendest, ask for Hero's tower, and come
Where she Love's lighthouse nightly did
illuminate ;
Inquire for white Abydos, too, and muse
Where young Leander life and love did lose ;
30 But now to tell how he fair Hero loved,
And how the maid to dote on him was moved.

Honey-sweet Hero, of a princely race,
Was priestess to Queen Venus in that place ;
And at her father's tower, by the sea set—
35 Herself a Queen of Love, though maiden yet—
Dwelt ; yet, for modesty and gracious shame,
She never to the city markets came ;
Nor mingled at the vintage in the dance,
Lest envious eyes upon her path should glance ;—

40 For evil ones will flout at fairer faces,—
But ever, in the holy temple-spaces,
She worshipped foam-born Venus, Queen above,
And Eros eke, the tiny Lord of Love,
Beseeching that she might unscathed go ;
45 Yet none the more 'scaped she delicious woe.

It was the time of the great offering
Made with high pomp at Sestos in the spring
To Venus and Adonis, and each year
A merry crowd did come from far and near
50 To keep this feast: all they that have their
home
Upon the rounded islets ringed with foam
In Marmora and westward ;—Hœmony,
And Cyprus, sent them, and the Cretan sea ;
Cythera, Phrygia, Libanus ;—with these
55 The nigher towns and cities swarmed like bees

To see the show ; but most of all the youth :—
Ever they throng where feasts are !—to tell truth,
'Tis not, methinks, the shrine which draws
 them so,—

Don't

To see the maidens those light pilgrims go !

60 And Hero, eke, went up unto the shrine,
Her face of alabaster all a-shine
Like the pure moon when first it swims the sky ;
Nathless her cheek was touched with tender dye
Such as new rose-buds have—not white nor red,

65 But sunlit-snow : in sooth you would have said
She was all made of rose-leaves, she did show
So fair and fine under her thin gown's flow,
Such rose-leaf arms ! such roseate shoulders !—see !
Of old, they said, the Graces were but three ;

70 Yet each sweet charm of Hero, as it seemed,
With love-spells of a hundred Graces gleamed.

Well was she worthy to be Venus' maid !

And even as she walked—stately and staid,

Liker a goddess than a priestess, fair

75 Beyond the fairest—Hero, unaware,

Took all eyes after her : no youth that day

But his heart beat as Hero passed that way,

Wishing such heavenly beauty his might be.

Thus, up the steps to the great Temple she

80 Drew still the looks, the thoughts, the sighs of men ;

And one among the strangers whispered then :—

“ Gods!—Helen's town I've seen, and Sparta's dames,

“ Whose charms make wars and give the world to flames ;

“ But never saw I one that could compare

85 “ With form so goddess-like and face so rare ;—

“ Quèen Venus sure hath made the youngest Grace

“ Her minister this morn ! oh, happy place

“ Which owns her! I could gaze until I die!

“ Would Zeus but grant me Hero, not his sky

90 “ Could tempt me to a wish! I would not be

“ A God, so Hero were but wife to me!

“ Since she is sacred and past mortal prayer,

“ Heaven send me soon a woman half so fair.”

Thus he, and others passioned otherwise,

95 Heart-stricken by the light of Hero's eyes.

But thou, Leander! when those bright eyes shone

One instant on thee, of the youths alone,—

Beyond wild words, beyond fond wishes—felt

The heart within thee with love's magic melt.

100 Others to win her wafted many a sigh,

He alone knew that he must have or die, *How*

In one brief glance love's lightning-flash did smite

All senses senseless with strange deep delight,

Left thrilling when her silken lashes sank,
105 And veiled the perilous glory his eyes drank.
What lightning strikes, in sooth, like a fair face ?
What arrow pierces like a woman's grace ?
'Tis the eyes slay, thence fly the subtle darts
Which deal swift wounds and hurt unguarded hearts.

110 So with Leander ; in his bosom strove
Passion with shame, and fear with forward love :
He trembled, and then blushed to tremble so ;
And vexed at blushing, straight did venturous grow ;
Eros at his heart's ear whispering amain
115 To lay shame by and speak : so was he fain
To steal a little closer, till he stood
Foot to foot with her : then in daring mood
Sidelong he glanced and murmured half a word ,
And checked it to a sigh, itself half heard :
120 Glance, word, and sigh so tender-timid were,
Their silent speaking could not anger her ;

Nay, but it pleased! that gentle stratagem
To tell the love which burned so plain in him;
And seeming to see naught, she saw, and bent
125 Her sweet head from him—not in discontent;
And seeming not to hear, she heard, and
sighed

A little silver sigh of pleased pride;
By signs unwitting giving him to know
It was not anger set her cheeks a-glow;
130 Then turned, ashamed of nothing;—but the boy *Boy*
Knew that she knew, and all his heart was joy.

So, while he lingered, one slight word to win,
Day—nigh to setting—drew her splendours in;
And shadow-loving Hesperus shone high,
135 Faint-seen upon the violet eastern sky:
Whereat,—the merry crowd thickening for home—
With desperate courage closer hath he come;

So close, he touched her rosy opened hand,
Heaving a deep sigh, plain to understand ;
140 And she, as one an angered, drew it in,
But so that he might see 'twas no great sin ;
Then, bolder, by her stole he took the maid,
And drew imploring towards the Temple's shade ;
Whereat, with pretty frown and faltering feet,
145 She followed, while she said, with chiding sweet,

“ Sir, are you mad ? how dare you hold me so ?
“ Leave plucking at my gown, and let me go !
“ If those who loved me saw, 'twould cost you dear ;
“ Besides, I am a holy priestess here,
150 “ Vowed to Queen Venus ! are you not afraid
“ To stay me so, and I, an honest maid ?”

Thus, as the manner of all maidens is,
Her soft lips rated, though her heart was his ;

And he by love's quick instinct knew it so,

155 And let her dear delicious accents flow

{ In anger musical, for when maids scold, }

{ With looks that pardon, lovers may be bold : }

But when she ceased and stood, he bent his head

Close to her pearly fragrant nape, and said,

160 With lips which trembled like his trembling heart,

“ Oh, Maid!—oh, Marvel!—if of earth thou
art,

“ And not a goddess, not divine—to me

“ Pallas or Cytheræa thou might'st be!

“ Art thou not sprung indeed of heavenly birth?

165 “ Scarce dare I deem thee denizen of earth!

“ But if of earth, ah, me! how godlike then

“ He who begot thee, of all mortal men!

“ How happy beyond happy mothers she

“ Who bore and nursed thee, sweet one, on her knee;

170 " And if of earth—oh! be of earth, and hear
" My pleading lips, my earnest humble prayer!
" Since thou art Venus' priestess, then take heed
" Thou vex her not by cruel word and deed;
" Be what thou seem'st by reverencing this shrine,

175 " The glory of thy Goddess should be thine;
" She liketh not a votary cold and coy—
" Love is her worship, and her service joy:
" If thou would'st keep her tender, high decree,
" My earnest passion should not anger thee,

180 " Being so' born for worship: therefore thou,
" If thou lov'st Venus, listen to me now.
" Dear servant of this temple—I am thine!
" As thou dost pray, I pray; ah! then, incline—
" As thou dost ask thy goddess—pitying ears

185 " Unto this suppliant sad with hopes and fears,
" Wounded by love, and captive at thy feet,
" As when, with wand of gold, Hermes the fleet

“ Brought Hercules—the strongest that could be—
“ Meek to the footstool of Queen Omphale.

190 “ Me Aphrodite, and not Hermes, sent ;

“ Think how thy goddess made that one repent,
“ Arcadian Atalanta, she who vowed
“ To die a maid, rejecting—cold and proud—
“ Hippomenes ; and yet it did befall

195 “ She grew to love him—heart, soul, mind, and
all ;

“ Yea ! even to frenzy—whom she did not love :
“ Oh, Sweet ! be wise, nor Venus' anger move.”

So, with soft flood of loving argument,
From coy reserve to yielding thoughts he bent
200 The maiden's mind ; but she, as maidens will,
Albeit convinced at heart, stood speechless still ;
Her lustrous eyes upon the ground fast set,
And hot face turned to hide the blush on it.

220 Who brought thee hither, and procured us pain ?

“ For all these sweet things said are said in vain.

“ How should a stranger—never seen or known—

“ Win me in marriage—if I would be won ?

“ Thou could’st not ask me openly for wife,

225 “ My parents would not give me ; and ’twere rife

“ With untold dangers if you lingered here

“ To meet me secretly ; for all is ear,

“ All eye in Sestos ! Things in silence done

“ Are said next morning at the market-stone.

230 “ But tell me—and tell true—what town is thine,

“ And whence thy birth and name ? Thou knowest mine,

“ Hero of Sestos ; yonder is my home,

“ In that tall tower whose foot stands in the foam ;

“ And there I dwell alone—but for one slave—

235 “ Outside the walls, over the breaking wave ;

“ Having no neighbour but the rolling sea !

“ No song but his rude music ! none to be

“ Friend or companion ! all the seasons there

“ The thunder of the mournful main I hear.”

240 So much she said—then stayed herself, and drew

The gown before her cheek to hide its hue,

And chid herself for speaking, sore ashamed :

But he—rejoiced because her words proclaimed

Hope of the prize—went meditating hard

245 How he should run to win the dear reward.

For Love hath many wiles to heal the heart

Of those that bleed with his unshunnèd dart ;

And, of himself, will counsel oft afford

To those of whom th' Almighty Boy is Lord :

250 So to Leander's heart he whispered low

A way to bliss, albeit the end was woe.

“ Sweet ! for thy love,” he cried, “ the sea I'd cleave,

“ Though foam were fire, and waves with flame did heave,

“ I fear not billows if they bear to thee ;
255 “ Nor tremble at the hissing of the sea !
“ And I will come—oh ! let me come—each night,
“ Swimming the swift flood to my dear delight :
“ For white Abydos, where I live, doth front
“ Thy city here, across our Hellespont.
260 “ Do but this thing, set thine own lamp on high,
“ To shine at evening through the dark’ling sky,
“ And I will be Love’s ship—my pilot-star
“ That beam, whereto, oaring my way afar,
“ I shall not see Bootes, nor his wain,
265 “ And bright Orion will be bright in vain.
“ Only take heed, Dear, of the winds, and shield
“ The light, that when I toil, by waves concealed,
“ It be not quenched by any envious blast,
“ Lest I go down—a ship and venture lost :
270 “ Sweetheart ! do this : my name if thou dost sue,
“ I am Leander, Hero’s lover true.”

Nothing she answered, save by one soft kiss,
Which sealed the contract of their sudden bliss ;
Then lip to lip they plighted faith for life,
275 He to be husband leal, she loving wife,
Albeit unwed ; and also did agree
That she should light the lamp, he swim the
sea.

All which deep bargain being got by heart,
With lingering words and looks they tore apart,—
280 She to her tower ; he through the gathering gloom,
Noting the landmarks, joyfully is come
Down to the beach, and ships with th' others there
For white Abydos, with its ramparts fair ;
Then waits till night gives him his new-won bride,
285 And Hero watches on the other side.

Soon o'er the sky Eve's purple curtains creep,
To all but young Leander bringing sleep :

He, when the darkness deepened, eager stood
Beside the white marge of the rolling flood,
290 His eyes quick-searching through the hollow
night,
To see the first flash of his lady's light ;
Far-shining light, that gleams to make him blest !
Dear light, that guides to Hero's beating breast !
She, when the darkness covered land and sea,
295 Kindled her lamp, and set it. Instantly
Love with that spark lighted Leander's soul ;
Eager he hailed the beam ; yet loud did roll
The thundering breakers on the shingly shore ;—
The first wave something chilled ;—but love is more
300 Than fear ; he laid his outer garb aside,
And spake unto himself by the cold tide :

“ Awful is love, and dreadful is the sea,
“ But fire is more than water unto me ;

“ And this that burns is stronger than much brine :

305 “ Think most of Eros, foolish heart of mine !

“ Care not for tumbling billows ; let us go

“ Straight over them to Hero ; why shrink so ?

“ Hast thou forgotten that Queen Venus came

“ Forth from the floods, and ever rules the same ? ”

310 Then with both hands from off his fair, smooth skin

He stripped his cloth, and tied his long locks in ;

And ran upon the reef, and sprang, and clove

The keen salt waves. So, swimming to his love,

He steered with face set hard where that ray shone,

315 Ship—pilot—rower—merchant, all in one.

Hero, the while, upon her turret-stair,

Guarded the beacon-lamp from every air ;

Spreading her gown that side and this, to keep

The breezes off ; but when, up from the deep,

320 Leander, breathless, came safe to the strand,
Down flew she to the sea-gate—caught his hand—
In gladness past all words, her white arms flung
Round him, and on his heaving bosom hung ;
And led him from the cold and foamy beach
325 Up to her tower ; and when her room they reach,
She wiped his pearly body clean of brine,
And took the salt smell off with unguents fine,
Stained with rose-essences and scented rare,
And then she clothed him in her long dark hair,
330 Yet panting from his voyage ; while in his ear
She poured these dulcet accents :—

“ Husband dear !

“ Sore thou hast toiled, as never one save thee

“ Battling the horrid deep, to come to me ;

“ Forget upon my lips the wave's harsh taste,

335 “ The fierce sea-monsters and the roaring waste ;

Dark hair

“ The port is reached ! Anchor, dear ship ! and have
“ The goods you sailed for in your Hero’s love.”

With that soft leave he loosed her virgin zone,
And took her—pure and perfect—for his own.

X ——— 340 No marriage-rite, no festal-dance was there,

None raised the hymn to Herë for the pair ;

No nuptial-torches blazed around the bed,

The merry long procession was not led ;

No sire the hymenæal blessing spoke,

345 No tender mother “ Hymen ” did invoke ;

But Silence spread their wedding-couch ; and she

Drew the close curtains of their ecstasy ;

The Night wore all her starry gems of pride,

To be bridesmaiden to that peerless bride ;

350 Hesper kept watch, and lingered over long,

Lest Dawn should find him there, and do them

wrong.

Dawn never saw Leander ! ere 'twas grey
To still Abydos' walls he made his way,
Full of love's comfort, but insatiate yet ;

355 While Hero in her turret did forget
All things save him—in that one day of life
Changed soul and body, grown from maid to
wife ;

And mightily did each on either shore
Pray dusk to come and daylight to be o'er.

360 Thus many a summer night they met unseen,
And had great bliss of love from Venus queen :
But no joy long endureth, and not long
Lived theirs, the gentle lovers of my song ;
For Winter came apace, with snow and frost,

365 And wild storms whistling up and down the coast :
Lashed to its depths the tortured ocean shrank,
While the wind drove its billows, rank on rank,

Scourging their crests milk-white ; all sailors then
Drew up their ships upon the shore, for men
370 Fear the fierce winter and the furious sea ;
But no fear, young Leander, hindered thee !
As oft as Hero showed the guiding light
So oft, through storm, and foam, and murky
night,
Swam he with steadfast passion to that guide,
375 Daring the dangers of the sweeping tide.
Ah ! Hero, wherefore call o'er such a sea ?
Too fond thou wert ; too bold and faithful he !
Thou should'st have left unlit thy lamp of love,
And waited till kind spring made green the grove ;
380 But love and fate compelled her ! so, o'ercome,
She set her light, and lured him to his doom.

There came one night, the wildest of the year,
When the wind smote like edge of hissing spear,

And the pale breakers thundered on the beach ;
385 While in mid-sea Leander toiled to reach
The far-off haven of his Hero's breast.
Sore-tossed he was from raging crest to crest ;
Billow on billow rolled, the great seas roared
Furiously leaping to the clouds, which poured
390 Sleet and brine back, with scream of winds that met
Midway from all the quarters :—Eurus set
His blast against the West Wind ; Notus blew
His cheeks to bursting, Boreas to subdue.
Ceaseless the tumult of the tempest was,
395 And young Leander in its midst, alas !
Battling th' inexorable bitter sea,
Called on the gods in his calamity.
To foam-born Venus many a prayer he made,
And oft the name of great Poseidon said ;
400 And oft grim Boreas he did implore
For Orithyia's sake to help him o'er.

Nothing he gained! Fate was too strong for Love!
The chill spray-laden storm beat him above;
Below, the monstrous buffets of the sea
405 Struck the strength from him; till, all helplessly,
His feet drooped down, relinquishing the strife,
Though his poor hands kept feebly on for life.
O'er lip and nostril now the salt waves clomb;
Gasping for breath, he breathed but choking foam;
410 Yet gleamed that light, and still he strove for
shore:

Sudden—a cruel gust blew!—all was o'er!
The gust extinguished Hero's lamp; the sea
Hid young Leander and his agony.

Hero, when that he came not, watched all night,
415 Into the darkness straining hard her sight;
And morning breaking—and no sign of him—
With aching heart she scanned the sea-face dim,

Fearing to look, because that lamp went out.
He was not there! but, casting still about,
420. Lo!—at the turret's foot his body lay,
Rolled on the stones, and soaked with breaking spray!
She rent her robe upon her, and leaped down
Headlong, distracted, from the turret's crown.
There on his corpse she breathed her dying breath;
425 And, linked in life, those two were one in death.

“Ἔρως δ' οὐκ ἤρκεσε Μοίρας.”

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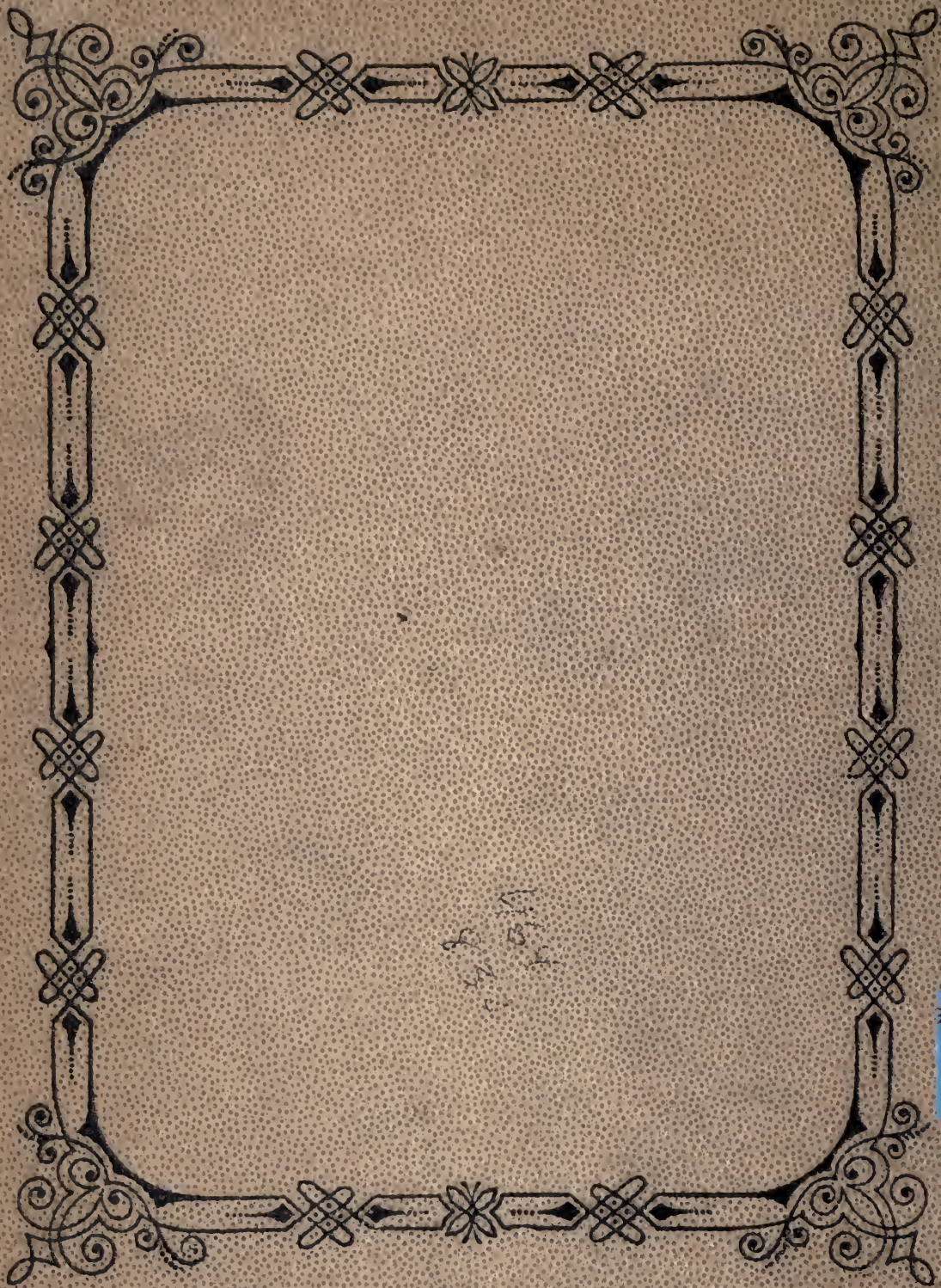
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