

Folkways Records, N. Y. FA 2319

AMERICAN BALLADS

Sung by

PETER

and his

SEEGER

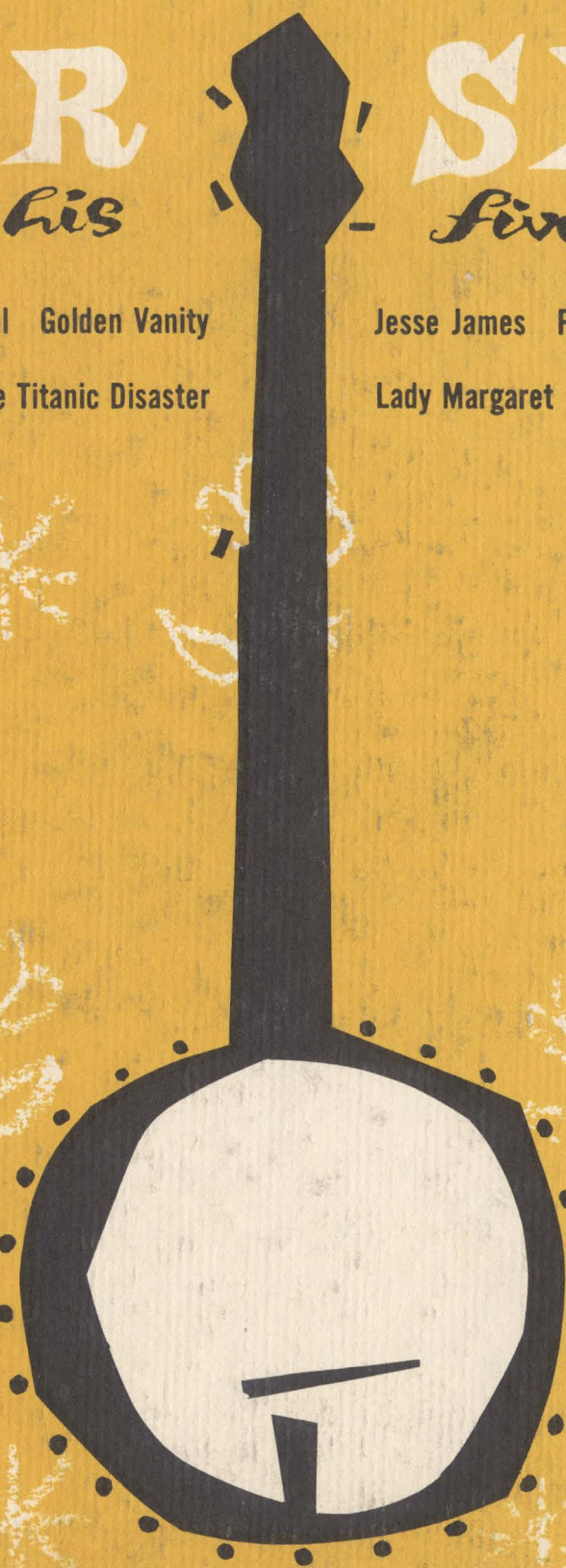
- five string banjo

The Lady of Castyle Gypsy Davy St. James Hospital Golden Vanity

John Henry Jay Gould's Daughter The Titanic Disaster

Jesse James Pretty Polly The Devil's Curst Wife

Lady Margaret John Hardy Barbara Allen The Three Butchers



Rosenhouse

AMERICAN BALLADS
Sung by

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FOLKLIFE PROGRAM
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SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

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FOLKWAYS RECORDS Album FA 2319

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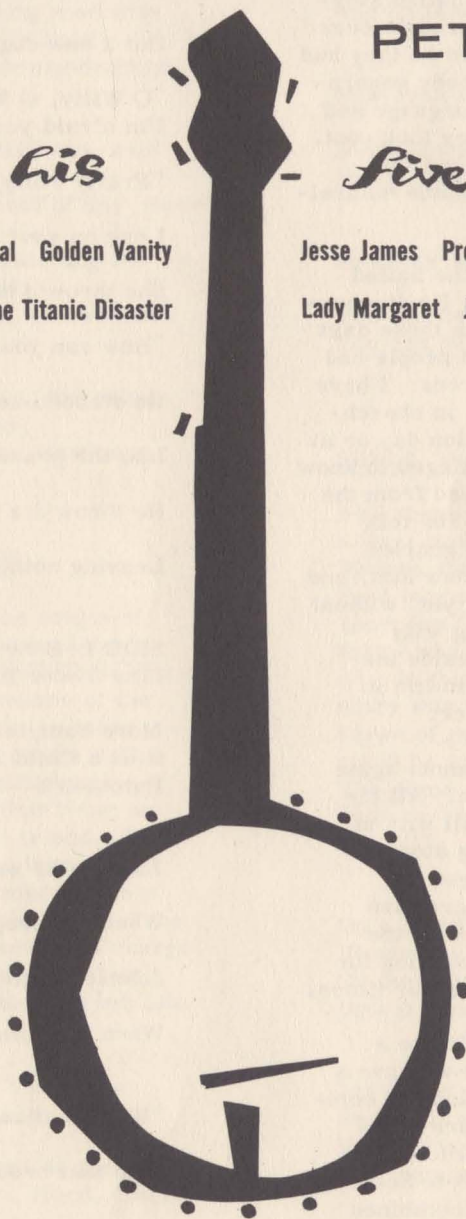
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"It were three bold and struggling men with
swords keen in hand,
Who that brought me here this morning with
my hair pinned to the
ground."

Well, Johnson being a man of his own, being
a man and bold,
He taken off his overcoat to cover her from the
cold.

Johnson getting on his horse, the woman getting
on behind,
Then they rode down that lonesome highway their
fortunes for to find.

They were riding all alone fast as they could
ride,
When she threw her fingers to her lips and gave
three shivering cries.

Out sprung three bold and struggling men with
swords keen in hand
Who that commanded Johnson, commanded him
to stand.

I will stop, then said Johnson, I will stop said
he,
For I never was in all my life afraid of any three.

Johnson killing two of them, not watching the
woman behind;
While he was at the other one, she stabbed him
from behind.

The day was free and a market day, the people
all passing by,
Who that saw this awful murdering, saw poor
Johnson die.

SIDE I, Band 3: JOHN HENRY

Research claims to have traced the origin of
this ballad to the building of the Swannanoa
tunnel through the West Virginia mountains dur-
ing the 1870's, although many versions of the
song are known, claiming the hero for other
states and other industries. The steam drill,
predecessor to the modern pneumatic jack-
hammer, was introduced around that time; an
ungainly machine cradled in a tall tripod. The
'shaker' was the man who held the long steel
drill, turning it slightly every stroke, to help
it bite into the rock. When the hole reached the
required depth, the drill was removed, a charge
of dynamite inserted, and following the blast,
more drilling would carry the tunnel deeper into
the mountains.

The captain said to John Henry, "I'm gonna
bring that steam drill
around,
I'm gonna bring that steam drill out on the job,
I'm gonna whup that steel on down. (lord, Lord!) (4)

John Henry told his captain, "Lord, a man ain't
nothing but a man,
But before I'd let your steam drill beat me down,
I'd die with a hammer in my hand!" (Lord, Lord) (4)

John Henry said to his shaker, shaker why don't you
sing, and
Because I'm swinging thirty pounds from my hips on
down;
Just listen to that cold steel ring. (Lord, Lord) (4)

Now the captain said to John Henry, "I believe
that mountain's caving in."
John Henry said right back to the captain,
"Ain't nothing but my hammer sucking wind."
(Lord, Lord) (4)

Now the man that invented the steam drill,
he thought he was mighty
fine,
But John Henry drove fifteen feet,
The steam drill only made nine. (Lord, Lord) (4)

John Henry hammered in the mountains, his
hammer was striking fire,
But he worked so hard it broke his pore heart
And he laid down his hammer and he died.
(Lord, Lord) (4)

Now John Henry had a little woman,
her name was Polly Anne,
John Henry took sick and had to go to bed
Polly Anne drove steel like a man,
(Lord, Lord) (4)

So every Monday morning when the blue birds
begin to sing
You can hear John Henry a mile or more;
You can hear John Henry's hammer ring,
(Lord, Lord) (4)

SIDE I, Band 4: JAY GOULD'S DAUGHTER

Folksongs usually run in families, and here is
a first cousin of the better known Casey Jones.
Verses about Jay Gould, the Wall Street rail-
road magnate, were common among hoboes: "I
know Jay Gould, he's a good friend of mine, and
that's why I'm riding on his railroad line" and so
on. In this genre of Negro balladry the exact
story was traditionally more vague, and any
verse of good poetry, philosophic or sarcastic,
could be inserted to deepen the general mood.
The same principle holds in similar ballads,
such as "Frankie and Johnny" or "The Boll
Weevil".

On a Monday morning it begin to rain
'Round the curve come a passenger train;
On the blinds was hobo John,
He's a good old hobo but he's dead and gone.
(repeat)

Jay Gould's daughter said before she died
Pappa fix the blinds so the bums can't ride;
If ride they must, they got to ride the rod,
Let them put their trust in the hands of God.
(repeat)

Jay Gould's daughter said before she died
Two more trains I would like to ride;
Jay Gould said daughter what can they be,
There's the Southern Pacific and the Santa Fee.
(repeat)

Jay Gould's daughter said before she died
There's two more drinks I would like to try;
Jay Gould said daughter what can they be,
A glass of water and a cup of tea.
(repeat)

Charlie Snyder was a good engineer
Told his fireman not to fear;
Said pour on your water, boy, shovel on your
coal,
Stick your head out the window, see the drivers
roal. (repeat)

SIDE I, Band 5: TITANIC DISASTER

For many children in summer camps today,
this is more a comic song than the tragedy
it was originally intended. But folksongs
tend to change with their audience or get left
behind. Negro balladsingers once had
sardonic verse telling how the captain of the
ship refused passage to the colored prize-
fighter, Jack Johnson.

It was on one Monday morning just about one
o'clock
When that great ship Titanic began to reel and
rock.
People began to scream and cry, saying Lord
am I going to die,
It was sad when that great ship went down.

Chorus:

It was sad, it was sad,
It was sad when that great ship went down,
Husbands and wives, little children lost their
lives,
It was sad when that great ship went down.

When that ship left England it was making for
the shore
The rich refused to associate with the poor;
So they put the poor below, they were the first
to go,
It was sad when that great ship went down.

Chorus:

While they were building they said what they
would do
We will build a ship that the water can't go
thru;
But God with power in hand showed the world
it could not stand,
It was sad when that great ship went down.

Chorus:

Those people on that ship were a long ways from
home —
With friends all around they didn't know that
the time had come;
Death came riding by, sixteen hundred had to
die,
It was sad when that great ship went down.

Chorus:

While Paul was sailing his men all around
God told him that not a man should drown
If you trust in me and obey, I will save you
all today,
It was sad when that great ship went down.

You know, it must have been awful with those
people on the sea
They say that they were singing nearer my
God to thee;
While some were homeward bound, sixteen
hundred had to drown
It was sad when that great ship went down.

SIDE I, Band 6: LADY MARGARET

(Fair Margaret and Sweet William)
(Child #74)

This ballad was one of the first I ever learned,
in 1935, from the country lawyer and old-time
banjo picker of Ashville, North Carolina, Bas-
com Lunsford. My thanks to him. It is a
medieval vignette, and the last verses describ-
ing the conversation between Lady Margaret's
ghost and her false lover are as close as we get
to superstition in this LP.

Lady Margaret sitting in her high hall door
Combing her long yellow hair.
She saw sweet William and his new made bride
Riding from the church so near.

She throw'd down her ivory comb
She throw'd back her long yellor hair.
Said, "I'll go down to bid him farewell
Never more go there."

It was all lately in the night,
When they were fast asleep.
Little Margaret appeared all dressed in white,
Standing at their bed feet.

"Well, how do you like your pillow, said she
How do you like your sheet?
How do you like that gay young lady
Lying in your arms asleep?"

"Very well do I like my pillow, said he
Very well do I like my sheet.
But better do I like that fair young lady
Standing at my bed feet."

.....

Once he kissed her lily-white hand,
Twice he kissed her cheek.
Three times he kissed her cold corpsy lips
Fell in her arms asleep.

.....

O, is little Margaret in her room
Or is she in the hall?
No little Margaret is in her coal-black coffin
With her face turned to the wall.

SIDE I, Band 7: JOHN HARDY

Here again research has traced the ballad to
its source (if there can ever be such a thing
as one source for a ballad showing the handi-
work of many musicians), to court records in
West Virginia of the trial and execution of

John Hardy, in 1894. Beyond that, we cannot vouch for the fictional or factual status of the song, since so many verses are common to other ballads as well.

John Hardy was a desperate little man
He carried two guns every day,
He shot down a man on the West Virginia
line,
You ought've seen John Hardy getting
away. (poor boy) (2)

John Hardy traveled to the Freestone Bridge
There, he thought he was free,
But up stepped the marshall, took him by the
arm
Says, "Johnny come along with me."
(poor boy) (2)

John Hardy had a ma and a pa,
Sent for them to go his bail,
But no bail's allowed on a murdering charge
So they laid John Hardy back in jail.
(poor boy) (2)

John Hardy had a little girl
The dress that she wore was blue,
She come skipping to that old jail hall
Saying "Johnny I been true to you."
(poor boy) (2)

John Hardy stood in his jail cell
The tears running down each eye,
Said I been the death of many a poor man
And now I am ready to die. (poor boy) (2)

I been to the east, I been to the west
I traveled the wide world 'round,
I been to the river and I been baptized
You can take me to my hanging ground.
(poor boy) (2)

Well, they hung John Hardy on the following
morn
They strung him way up in the sky,
The last words I heard that poor boy say
My six-shooter never told a lie.
(poor boy) (2)

SIDE II, Band 1: THE GOLDEN VANITY

Among the many hundreds, perhaps thousands of variant melodies, this version is one of the most recent. It was learned from a recording made by the Carter Family, one of the most popular of the commercial singers of southern country music during the Nineteen Thirties. Rumor has it that the captain in the original story was Sir Walter Raleigh. This may be unfair. We do not know.

There was a lofty ship and she put to sea
And the name of this ship was the Golden Vanity
As she sailed upon the low and lonesome low
As she sailed upon the lonesome sea.

She had not been out but two weeks or three
When she was overtaken by a Turkish Revelee

As she sailed upon the low and lonesome low
As she sailed upon the lonesome sea.

Then up spake our little cabin boy
Saying "What will you give me if I will then destroy
If I sink them in the low and lonesome low
If I sink them in the lonesome sea?"

"O, the man that them destroys," our captain then
replied,
"Five thousand pounds and my daughter for his bride
If he sinks them in the low and lonesome low
If he sinks them in the lonesome sea."

Then the boy smote his breast and down jumped he
He swum till he came to the Turkish Revelee
As she sailed upon the low and lonesome low
As she sailed upon the lonesome sea.

He had a little tool that was made for the use
He bored nine holes in her hull all at once
And he sunk her in the low and lonesome low
He sunk her in the lonesome sea.

He swum back to his ship and he beat upon the side
Cried, "Captain pick me up for I'm wearied with the
tide
I am sinking in the low and lonesome low
I am sinking in the lonesome sea."

"No! I will not pick you up" the captain then replied
"I will shoot you I will drown you I will sink you in
the tide
I will sink you in the low and lonesome low
I will sink you in the lonesome sea."

"If it was not for the love that I bear for your men
I would do unto you as I did unto 'them'
I would sink you in the low and lonesome low
I would sink you in the lonesome sea."

Then the boy bowed his head and down sunk he
Farewell, farewell to the Golden Vanity
As she sails upon the low and lonesome low
As she sails upon the lonesome sea.

SIDE II, Band 2: BLACK JACK DAVY (Gypsy Davy) (Child #200)

The melody sung in this version was learned from a man in upstate New York, a mechanic in the American Locomotive works at Schenectady. He said his mother, whose family had earlier come up from Rhode Island, had taught him the song. The verses, however, have been pieced together from other sources, since he could only remember three.

Black Jack Davy come a-riding along
Singing so loud, and gaily,
He sang so loud the wildwoods rung,
He charmed the heart of a lady.

Refrain:
Come a raddle raddle lingo lingo ling
Raddle raddle lingo, Davy (repeat)

How old are you my pretty little miss
How old are you my honey,

She answered him with a tee hee hee,
I'll be sixteen next Sunday.

Refrain:

Come, go with me my pretty little miss
Go with me my honey,
I'll take you across the deep blue sea
You'll never want for money.

Won't you pull off those high-heeled shoes
Made of Spanish leather,
Won't you put on some low-heeled shoes
We'll ride off together.

Refrain:

She soon pulled off those high-heeled shoes
Made of Spanish leather,
She put on those low-heeled shoes
They rode off together.

Refrain:

It was late at night when the Lord came home
Inquiring for his lady,
The servants said on every hand
She's gone with the Gypsy Davy.

Refrain:

Go saddle me my buckskin mare
The gray is not so speedy,
I'll ride all day and I'll ride all night
Till I overtake my lady.

Refrain:

He rode till he came to the deep, below
The stream was deep and muddy,
The tears come a-trickling down his cheeks
For there he spied his lady.

Refrain:

How can you leave your house and land
How can you leave your baby,
How can you leave your husband dear
To go with the Gypsy Davy.

Refrain:

Very well can I leave my house and land
Very well can I leave my baby,
Much better can I leave my husband dear
To go with the Gypsy Davy.

Refrain:

I won't come back to you my love
I won't come back my husband,
No I wouldn't give a kiss from David's lips
For all your land and money.

Last night I lay on a goose-feather bed
Beside my husband and baby,
Tonight I lay on the cold, cold ground
Beside the Gypsy Davy.

She soon run through her gay clothing
Her velvet shoes and stockings,
Her golden rings on her finger was gone
And the gold plate off her bosom.

Once I had a house and land
A feather-bed and money
But now I have come to an old straw pad
With nothing but Gypsy Davy.

SIDE II, Band 3: THE FARMER'S CURST
 WIFE

(Child #278)

I would lay this song alongside Barbara Allen
as being the most well known English ballad in
America. It is known in a thousand and one
varieties, but nearly always has some sort of
nonsense refrain.

There was an old man lived over the hills
If he aint moved out he's living there still.

Come a fa-dee-ing, ding, da dee-ing, etc.

Well, the devil come up to him one day
Said one of your family I'm gonna take away.

Please don't take my eldest son
There's work on the farm and it's got to be done.

O, it's not your eldest son I crave
It's your scolding wife I'm going to take away.

Well, the old man jumped up with a start
Saying you can take her with all my heart.

The devil picked her up upon his back
He looked like an eagle scared off the wrack.

He carried her on about a mile down the road
Saying old woman you're a helluva load.

He carried her down to the gates of hell
Saying poke up the fire we'll scotch her well

There were two little devils with ball and chain
Up with her foot and she kicked out their brains.

Nine little devils went climbing up the wall
Saying take her back daddy, she'll murder us all.

I get up next morning, I peeked out of the crack
I seen the old devil dragging her back.

He said here's your wife, both sound and well
If I had kept her there longer she'd have torn up
hell.

This only goes to show what a woman can do
She can whup out the devil and her husband too.

It shows one advantage women have over men
They can go down to hell and come back again.

SIDE II, Band 4: DOWN IN CARLISLE
(In Castyle There Lived A Lady)

This story undoubtedly goes back to Roman
days, if not earlier. The better known ver-
sion has the brave gallant finally throwing
the fan in the face of the lady who wanted him
to risk his life for her pleasure, but we give
the song here almost exactly as learned from

a recording (now in the Library of Congress Folklore Archives) made in 1937 by Clay Walters of Salyersville, Kentucky.

Down in Carlisle there lived a lady
Being both beautiful and gay,
She was determined to live a lady
No man on earth could her betray.

Unless it were a man of honor
A man of honor and high degree;
Then there approached two loving soldiers
This fair lady for to see.

One being a brave lieutenant
A brave lieutenant and a man of war,
The other being a brave sea-captain
Captain of a ship that's come from far.

Then up spoke this fair young lady
I can be but one man's bride,
If you will return tomorrow morning
On this case we will decide.

She ordered her a span of horses
A span of horses at her command,
And they rode down the hill together
Till they came to the lions' den.

And there they stopped and there they halted
While the two stood gazing around;
And for the space of a half an hour
This young lady lies speechless on the ground.

Then after a while she did recover
She throw'd her fan to the lion's den,
Said which of you to gain a lady
Will return my fan again.

Then up spoke the brave lieutenant
In a voice both loud and high,
I know I am a dear lover of women
But I will not risk my life for love.

Then up spoke the brave sea-captain
In a voice both loud and clear,
I know I am a dear lover of women
I will return your fan or die.

Then into the lions' den he boldly entered
The lions being both wild and fierce,
He walked around and in among them
Then returned her fan again.

And when she saw her true love a-coming
Seeing no harm had come to him,
She throw'd her head upon his bosom
Saying here's the prize that you have won.

SIDE II, Band 5: ST. JAMES HOSPITAL

This song is one of a large family, all descended from a street broadside of the late 18th Century known as 'The Unfortunate Rake'. It travelled to the new world, where the rake became a sailor, a lumberjack, a miner, a cowboy, as each ballad singer re-shaped the story to suit a local situation. This version was recorded in Texas by John Lomax, from the singing of James Baker, in 1934.

Early one morning I passed the St. James
Hospital

Early one morning in the month of May;
When I looked through the window
I spied a dear cowboy, I spied a dear cowboy
as cold as clay.

Come sit you down by me and hear my sad
story
Come sit you down by me and sing this song,
My sad heart is breaking
For my poor head is aching
I am a poor cowboy and know'd I done wrong.

Send for the doctor to heal up my body
Send for the preacher to pray for my soul
My sad heart is breaking
My poor head is aching
I am a poor cowboy and hell is my doom.

Get sixteen young maidens to carry my coffin
Get sixteen young maidens to sing this song
And tell them to bring some of them sweet
smelling roses
So they can't smell me as we ride along.

Beat the drum slowly and play the fife lowly
Sing the death march as you carry me along,
And over my coffin throw bunches of lily's,
There goes a poor cowboy and he know'd he
done wrong.

SIDE II, Band 6: JESSE JAMES

Jesse James was a lad, he killed many a man
He robbed the Glendale train;
He took from the rich and he gave to the poor
He'd a hand and a heart and a brain.

Oh Jesse had a wife to mourn for his life
Three children, they were brave;
But that dirty little coward that shot
Mr. Howard
He laid poor Jesse in his grave.

It was on a Saturday night and the moon was
shining bright,
They robbed the Glendale train,
With the agent on his knees, he delivered up
the keys
To these outlaws Frank and Jesse James.

The people held their breath when they heard
of Jesse's death
They wondered how he ever came to fall;
Robert Ford, it was a fact, shot Jesse in the
back
While Jesse hung a picture on the wall.

O Jesse was a man, a friend of the poor
He'd never rob a mother or a child;
He took from the rich and he gave to the poor
So they shot Jesse James on the sly.

Well, this song was made up by Billy Gachet,
As soon as the news did arrive;
He said there was no man with the law in his
hand
Who could take Jesse James when alive.

SIDE II, Band 7: BARBARA ALLEN
(Child #84)

In Scarlet Town where I was born
There was a fair maid dwelling;
Made many a youth cry well-a-day
Her name was Barbara Allen.

It was in the merry month of May
When green buds they were swelling;
Sweet William came from the west country
And he courted Barbara Allen.

He sent his servant unto her
To the place where she was dwelling;
Said my master's sick, bids me call for you
If your name be Barbara Allen.

Well, slowly, slowly got she up
And slowly went she nigh him;
But all she said as she passed his bed
Young man I think you're dying.

Then lightly tripped she down the stairs
She heard those church bells tolling;
And each bell seemed to say as it tolled
Hard-hearted Barbara Allen.

O, mother, mother go make my bed
And make it long and narrow;
Sweet William died for me today
I'll die for him tomorrow.

They buried Barbara in the old church yard
They buried Sweet William beside her;
Out of his grave grew a red, red rose
And out of hers a briar.

They grew and grew up the old church wall
Till they could grow no higher;
And at the top twined in a lovers' knot
The red rose and the briar.

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