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Aaron Fletcher

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Astraphobia

What I would fear most about the storm outside, is that it would end. Thus, leaving the storm to rage on inside of the place I know as home. The rough and grumpy clouds, harboring the tumultuous thunder and ravenous lightning, would lead us outside. My father was the first to go. He would see the rolling clouds and hear the crashing thunder before any of us, and out he would go to face the forces of nature on his own front porch. I would follow closely behind, wanting so dearly to be like my family's patriarch in every way. My mother and brother would soon follow suit, leaving the house empty, with all its residents facing the danger outside.

Lightning and then thunder. That is the only order I have come to understand. I would count between the strike and the crash, listening to the rain in the calm silence between. The rain isn't always there; But it always seems like it should be. Without it, the calm is gone and the void is left empty. The only occupants being the numbers I slowly count off to myself. Distance. That is what I am trying to find. Do I just count the seconds? Do I count and then divide by two? It doesn't matter because I will never know and it keeps changing. It gets closer and closer, leaving me hardly any room to count.

Strike... Silence... Crash... Strike... Silence... Crash... Strike... Silence... Crash... STRIKESILENCECRASH...

And all the while, the rain keeps count of the seconds in between.

Once the lightning was gone, the rain would slow to a drizzle. All that was left to the rain would be the thunder, which was now only a low rumble. And I would sit there with my father. And that's how I knew he loved me. I knew it because he was never scared through the crashing and striking, and, if he wasn't scared, I wasn't either. For, with the lightning gone, the rain only a drizzle, and the thunder reduced to a rumble, what was there to fear?

The only thing that worried father, was the wind. The wind was like the lightning, threatening to destroy all it touched. The only difference being that the wind would often follow through with its threats. My father worried because the wind threatened so much. It could blow debris into the house and cause damage to the structure he lived in. The wind could harm an unlucky animal or pet or beloved family member. Or, the wind could take something and blow it away to never be seen again.

The wind often seems to cause the storms, and, therefore, causes the battles between thunder crashes and lightning strikes. If the wind didn't cause the battle, it brought the angry cloud containing it closer and closer.

All the while, the rain is both there and not. But, the rain can also be manipulated by the wind. The wind can shove the rain to the side, making it fall forcefully in a direction it would not have chosen on its own.

The presence of wind always causes the rain to have an unnerving chill. This is what would cause Father and I to come inside. The light splashes of rain that would come onto the porch never bothered us. They were a refreshing kiss of mist, begging us to stay longer. But, the harsh wind could cause bursts of icy liquid daggers to stab into us and threaten being drenched. This is why the wind worried my father. It threatened so much, but never seemed to bring any good.

My father would often talk about taming the wind.

"A windmill", he says, "That will do it."

He follows this statement saying:

"The wind isn't here too often, and it isn't always strong when it is, but a windmill sure could help."

I guess what he means is a wind turbine. This would allow us a source of renewable power that could solve many issues, most of them monetary. But the taming of the wind always seems out of reach. Freedom is what the wind wants, even if that comes at the cost of thunder and lightning. Perhaps the wind is jealous of the rest of the storm. Maybe it knows that rain, thunder, and lightning can exist without it. Especially rain.

Rain is usually found alone. Guiding itself through the skies and onto the ground with nary a push from thunder, wind, or lightning. Rain tends to help. It provides life to plants and crops, renews dried creek beds, and cleanses dirt off the various playthings left outdoors by children.

But there is danger in too much rain. Downpours can wash out gravel drives, flood a farmer's field, or ever cause a usually well-tempered body of water to swallow bridges. Through this occurrence, I assume that the saying "all things in moderation" also applies to natural weather phenomena.

As I recall my experience with weather, I find myself in yet another storm. But, instead of submerging myself in the thunder, lightning, and wind, I find myself within the walls of my home. Even though my family is in bed rather than facing mother nature on our front porch, I still count the seconds between each brilliant flash of lightning and the subsequent crash of thunder like each number has a meaning to me. And, filling in every silent moment, the rain continues to fall calmly onto all things exposed to the now blackened sky. The rain is always there, whether you know it or not. All the while it is watching, listening, and counting. Trying to figure out when one storm will end and give way to another.

I no longer fear the end of nature's storm. I merely expect it and prepare for all that comes after. I find my center in the rain, which remains calm within the lightning, wind, and thunder. My fear is taken by the numbers that quietly form on my lips, each one dropping like the rain that falls between thunder and lightning.

Fall, Fell, Fail, Failing

God I'm lost
Or maybe you left.
I forfeit myself to you, but why am I still here?
I know lord, it's my fault lord.
But why can't I receive the help that was given
So long ago.
Dear God, where did I go?
Where did You go?
Where am I?
Am I Adam?
Or am I the serpent that tempts Eve
Eve, the eve, the fall of man
Dear god am I man?
I pray, I pray, I pray.
I fell lord
I fell from grace like the one that you held so highly lord
I'm here lord.
At least I think I'm here
I call to you, I'm kneeling lord and doing all I can to make you hear my call.
I know you're there lord.
I'm in your house.
I'm with your people
I'm in front of you lord.
But still I hear you ask
With that booming voice
And those ever grieving words
"Where are you?"
Lord I'm here
I'm here lord.
Lord are you crying?
Am I crying?
I fell lord, I fell down
I'm falling
Calling
Breathing
Heaving deeply and crying for your everlasting grace to fall
Fall on me
Fall on all of us
Or maybe it has
Maybe it has and the fall that fell has failed
Am I lost God, or are you?
Did I lose you? Did you lose me?
Lord, I fell. But as I fell, you have failed.
Lord, you are great
You are kind
You are gracious
You are angry
You hold the sinners in your hand,
You held the sinners in your hand and they fell
Fell like me
Down a slippery
Sliding
Slope.
Lord, I fell, I fell, and I failed.
I failed lord,
but as I fail,
you fall

Whiskey Burning

They say it's supposed to burn, But I don't feel it.
What burned, Was the feeling of my lips against yours.
I thought it was passion setting a fire in my body.
I was Drunk. I was a Drunk. I was Drunk in love.
People will help an alcoholic.
But where do you go when you're addicted to the pain she gives you every time she touches your body.
The whiskey will never burn the way your kiss did.
The pain will never be the same.
I can't count the nights I tried to replicate that pain on two hands.
But I can count the times I felt your love on one with room to spare.
Your touch felt like fire, but it wasn't the coveted burning love that is so sought after among hopeless romantics.
I thought I had what they wished for, but I was surrounded by the painful passion which leads to lives lost too soon.
I'm still healing. But, the pain will always stay.
I can feel the burning now.
But it isn't from the whiskey running down my throat.

Gone Without Blame

Here I am again,
With my clumsy
Left Hand.
The literature class,
The same seat.
It's Rainy today.
Well, it's dark out
And someone has an
Umbrella.
Had, they had.
They walked out of my sight.
And, therefore, out of my life.
Easily, Briskly,
Gone forever.
But I might see them again.
They're gone because they didn't
Want Me
Need Me
Know Me
They're Gone for the same reason that
I'm Not Here.
And I Don't Blame Them.

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Sophia Gugino

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Love is Action

Some people say they have
'Fallen out of love'
But there is no such thing.
Once you love someone,
There is never a way to un-love them,
As much as we try to muster a solution.

Love isn't a feeling.
It is not a reaction.
It is an action.
Many actions all piled up into this one singular word.

You don't love someone simply
Because of how they make you feel,
That is only a fraction of it.

You love someone because of the countless times
You have watched them fail, yet try again and again.
You love someone because when you had no one else,
They were there for you, listening and hanging on to every word you said,
Reassuring you when you felt lost and confused,
Inspiring you when the only thing you felt motivated to do was sit on your couch and cry.
Lifting you up and reaching out their hand when you were at the bottom of the pit.
Helping you out of the messes you were in.

You can't say that **that's** a feeling.

Love is strong.
Love is like an anchor, binding your faith in that person,
A rope both of you are balanced on.
Love is patience.
Love is choosing to stay when all you've ever done is run.
Love is standing in their shoes,
And accepting it from their viewpoint,
Even when all you want to do is yell and scream how you-and only you-are right.
Love is hard.
Love isn't simple.
It's the most complicated thing.
A single word cannot begin to describe this phenomenon expressed by even the cruelest of human beings.
Love isn't happiness.
It's not what's going to make you smile at that one moment.
Love is staying strong for that person
When you've wanted so long to curl up into a ball yourself.

melting morning

It was a winter's day.
Mornings quieter,
Nights longer,
An icy sheet of paper-thin glass
Laid out delicately on the road.

Outside,
In the front,
A curious little chipmunk rushes out from behind the
Immense pine tree leaning against our house.
It scurried across the lawn,
Snatching a frozen,
Surely hard,
Acorn,
And rushing back to it's temporary home.

I woke up at an unusual time for me.
8:30 am.
Early.

Stepping outside with my bare feet pressed cold
Against the gravel,
I gripped the cup of coffee tightly against my palms,
Letting the heat seep through the holes of my cream-colored, wool sweater.
A thick layer of fog covers the horizon,
Blurring the red and brown brick buildings
That have become a part of my landscape.

I watched as slowly,
The street came to life,
Parents rolling out of bed,
Grooming as their alarms go off,
And tiptoeing down their carpeted staircases,
Trying not to wake their kids.
A single mom, overworked and fatigued,
Planting a kiss on her toddler's forehead,
Saying goodbye,
The pets of the household,
Already long awoken,
Scurrying towards their owners,
Scratching and whining their way outside,
The outdoor cats roaming the neighborhood,
Searching for breakfast.
The morning stirs of the quiet winter breathing into life.

Enemy

He snakes out from under your mattress,
Snatching you when you're vulnerable.
His wide, bony, gray fingers,
Cold like ice,
From then on,
He's captured you.
His mind-numb slaves have tightened the fraud-soaked cloth around your eyes.
You are blind to the truth,
Slowly believing more and more each day,
The lies he breathes into your ears
When you lie awake, restless, in the night.
A thief.
He has stolen your soul
Right out from under your ignorant, naive nose,
Unable to tell the difference between black and white.
He keeps it on display along with the others he's drawn in over the years,
Hypnotized beyond control,
Drained of compassion,
Beaten with deception,
Tempted beyond disgust,
Their souls merely a thing of the past,
He wears like a badge,
Anxious to grab ahold of yours,
And to strip it bare of its humanity,
When he is prowling the alleys for the innocent,
He may happen upon you,
At your darkest, weakest moments,
And tap you lightly on the shoulder,
A wide grin spread across his face,
Eager and ready to seize your soul.
He rides in the shadows of the crooks,
The fools don't think twice about inviting him into their home.
He appears at night, like a thick, unexpected fog
That bathes the lies.
That appears appealing to the utterly broken.
He is not what they seek.

Maiden of the Earth

Your bare feet are on the earth.
Wind whistles through the empty air, filling the space.
Your hair is swept back in a messy heap of waves cascading down your back.
Damp dirt squishes between your toes, cold and soft.

The only sound heard is the yawning of the willow trees
As they bend into life,
Stars slowly start to appear in the sky,
One by one,
For the obliteration of one means the beginning of 2 more.

Gushing of water winds its way through your ears,
Intensifying every time it splashes over a rock on its way down the stream.
Thin, rough pieces of grass rub against your calves,
Almost like sandpaper.

A sudden fluttering in the distance catches your left eye,
And you peer up,
Catching a glimpse of ivory and chestnut dotted feathered wings
Gliding past the trees, accompanied by the distant hoots of an owl.

The creature of the night, who owns the night,
Crawl out from their hiding places and scatter every direction,
Prowling the earth for any disturbances,
Acting as the dusk bodyguards,
Doing their job as the daylight walkers did theirs.

Good Neighbors

Kids race down the street,
misguided.
Linked, hand in hand,
unfortunate.
Erupting in laughter
As they enjoy the sweet summer air,
tortured.

Couples sit out on their porches,
Sipping tea and chatting with old friends
About memories long forgotten.
They'll occasionally wave to a friend
As they pass by the house,
Maybe even invite them
To sit with them.

A simple invitation
Is all that's needed.
A way of gratitude,
A gesture of love
And peace.
people

When autumn sneaks around the corner,
And the Alexander's lawn is ridden with leaves,
All shades of red, orange, and yellow.
You can imagine.
The boy and his sister
Will gleefully offer to rake their lawns
Free of charge
Out of simple hospitality.
Because that is what good neighbors do.

And then comes the ghosts,
Whispering nightmares through the block,
With their icy breath leaving chills
Down your spine.
Halloween has arrived.

So the family gets their fire pit
From their backyard.
And brings it around to the front.
Amber flames engulf the street.
Inviting neighbors to sit for a while,
Share stories,
Laugh and fill the broken void inside them,
With the love of their good neighbor.
This is how it should be.

Instead,
the elite barricade their doors from the
the lucky hide their children from the
and the minds of the narcissistic
Are forbidden from seeing the souls of the

We rush out of our paper houses,
jump into the seats of our ridiculously expensive
Designer cars, hidden beneath tinted windows.
We keep the private details locked inside,
only allowing our children to wander within
the limits of their fenced-in manicured lawns,
So as to keep them from the 'dirty street kids'.

we've traded wide, open front porches
For huge backyard decks,
only meant for the eyes of the deserving.
That way we can keep our lives private
And aren't forced to make small talk with
people

We view as less than us.

no longer do we have an honest view
of the world,
considering we hide behind bolted doors,
seeing only what we want to see.
we have no tolerance for mistakes,
we have grown impatient of talking to strangers,
Now the only reason for a conversation
Is if it is for your own personal gain.

we lock our hearts away,
and swallow the key.
day in and day out
Is the same droning routine.
Drained of our patience, energy, and empathy.

I bet you don't even know the names of the people
within a 10 foot radius of your steps.
What has this world become
that even our neighbors
have become irrelevant?
when describing your life,
you don't even recognize the people
Who have surrounded you since birth.
What has become of the good neighbor?

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Jasmine Warner

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Sorry

Slamming doors, lack of care
no communication as if
we haven't spoken in years
Loss of a friend who has
meant more than most

Reconnecting a while later
is not the same,
it's been torn.
Walking on glass
gentle and slower than before.

The use of sorry means different to me now
Throwing it around as a form of protection.

You've made me stronger in a sense
although I'm still afraid of my feelings
Thank you.
I hold back Apologizing when I shouldn't
Saying sorry when it isn't my fault.

Wishing that it could
have been different won't change anything
I'm scared and all I can do is wish, but
You and your actions changed me for good
And I'm sorry
about our fight.

Sweet Dreams Are Made of You

Swaying alone almost center stage
in the sweaty gym
Sworn to my innocence as if it were binding
Striking up a conversation with him
would be swell.
Showily sweet talking him,
Sweeping me off my feet
it would be our own small fairytale
him the king and I the queen.

Swaying together amongst the swarm
Pure as a swan
his hand skimming the small of my back
the scent of my sweet perfume
filling his senses.
Careful not to swash my way
through the music.

Swaying until the last song plays
then him walking me home.
Giving me his sweater as a symbol
of his admiration for me
to swipe the goosebumps from my skin.

On my doorstep scooting in close
I open my eyes wishing to live it again
Willing to swap my reality
for a moment so fictitious,
a special night that isn't realistic.

The World *After the Wild Geese*

You don't have to be brave or strong
To put up a good front
You don't have to pretend to you are okay
to feel okay in the crowd, struggling.
You only have to sift through your feelings
in the way you want.

Tell me about secrets, yours, and I will tell you mine.
In the meantime life goes on.
In the meantime the moon still comes up,
shining a different shade each night,
over the homes and lives of many.
In the meantime everyone will go home
to their particular pods
where they feel most comfortable, most free.

No matter who you are, or how distant you may feel,
the world offers itself to you,
coming to you in arm's length, open and inviting
again and again giving you a home,
A comfort zone, in the people who care.

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Brianna Williams

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Fragments

His body against mine is both like a pile of sand and concrete
Heavy is the weight of the love he has for my body, and soft is the touch of his lips on mine
His cowardice makes me itch, why doesn't he just love me?
His smile is like a baby on my chest
It fills it with anxiety so heavy that I wake gasping for air
-----desperate to break away from the snare I allow him to tangle me in
Yet it is comforting, knowing that I hold that smile so tight against me
I gave him the one thing I was taught was most valuable about me
He opened me, like an eager child opening a present on Christmas morning
-----So naïve, and aloof about the care it took to wrap it so beautifully
Again and again I return to be torn into pieces, but I wait until the paper machetes of my heart
have been repaired with glue
Which is no match to the adhesive that sticks me to him
Thin and cracked like the trust I have for men, for any man that is not him
For him
He is the floor that the breaks glass, and the wrecking ball that demolishes my soul
He tears through my heart like lions tear through the flesh of their prey
Like such an abused thing, I come back to him eager for more
Eager for more weight, eager for him to tear into me, teeth sharp, and claws bared
-----Eager for him to suffocate me
Eager for him to bleed me out as I have let him so many times before
And eager he is to do it again.

Ownership

I am Black that much I know.
Oh yes, I am Black, because they
Told me so.
My words are not to be heard,
I am not fair.
I have the right to be defined by
Brown eyes,
and curly hair.
No, my eyes don't belong to me.
These eyes see what they see.
My body
is not my own.
It's His temple, it's what I was told.
Constantly I chant, "Oh yes, you can!"
And now
I shall not allow this temple,
Be defined by a man.
I am Black that much I know.
Oh yes, I am Black, because they
told me so.

Can you hear me?

So concerned with what I do
But never took the time to hear me
And I mean actually hear me
I speak, but I don't feel heard.
Never took the time to heal me
And I mean actually heal me
I hurt, but I don't feel safe.
The only time I hear from them is when they want something from me
Never want something with me
Only things against me.
The only time I hear from them is when they have something to say
But not much of anything to say
Only things against me.
They try to read me like a book, but the words are disfigured.
They try to pull me in but there's nothing keeping me there.
There's nothing they can offer me anymore.
Sometimes feelings fade.
Sometimes people fade.
Sometimes I fade.

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Linneah Deighton

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A Serpent Trail

Path. Unaware of
The ringing of night
A spider from hell
She could tunnel holes beneath death.

The devil hides innocent victims with
Traacherous, red limbs
Dragging me into the anguished world.

Place my cement ground somewhere
By my shoulders.
This stinging skeleton melted for
The pit
And a painful death.

Still, I drape myself with ropes,
Dangerous tides,
And good dreams.

My Wisdom Teeth

Teeth
So many teeth
Buried in the skull and padlocked away
They poke through the pink and red
Fall
Pulled
Soiled

Infected
Disgusting

Many fear the man
With the metal hands

Allergies

Violent language and tormented cries
Ragweed dies and its children rise
From the ashes

A phoenix of death meant to inflect
Suffering pain
Mucous green and slime
Speckled red

Tears drip into your honeyed nostrils,
Clogging drains

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Morgan Campbell

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Word Poem

Facetious woman
Precocious worm
You are nothing more than your body
You are the sum of your parts
You were made to be humble and mellow, not snobby
You must treat eunuchs, liars, and catfishers with kindness even with their sly ways.
Honey s what you will be, sophisticated in flavor to be savored - over and over
Because a woman will only be a pussy
A shadow of independence
You'd've been smart if you just took it, you cunt
You chunky whore, you loose thot, cum lactating bitch
My dick is a blessing
So let me shower you with my love as the dark is the only witness to our melancholic dance

Homage to my Eyes

My eyes can see for free, and they take in all
A stormy gray green - lilies with cloudy
pond water dancing together.
A white bright blue, with its dark ring
around the outside - looking up through
a hole in ice as you float
helplessly in the frigid embrace.
My eyes have cried oceans to drown and
burned holes through skulls.
My eyes are blue agates, lapis lazuli's,
aquamarines.
My eyes are blueberries, feathers of blue jays,
water.
My eyes have witnessed assault, abuse
lies dripping from your lips like acid.
My eyes are powerful - stopping you where you stand in fear or awe,
bringing you to your knees in a single look.
My eyes are dry and burn from my 20 hour day, but I'm not done yet.
I know they can go on for a little while
longer.

Marlboro Lights

The smoke of regret hangs on my clothes
as if I just ran wildly through pricker bushes.
The burning cuts on my soft flesh sting from the ghost touches of roses.
My soul, burns from the moonless pleasure of you leaving.
Angels are the only one who witness me breaking
in the hotel.
I strip and submerge
into the mirror. Flesh glittering and burning from the soapy droplets.
It still smells like your rehearsed words.
Cigarette stained lies.

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Quinlan Bentley

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Perceptions of Reality

When you enter the world
Life seems so simple
Days are longer
Nights are blissful
When you've been in the world
Life reveals itself
Nights are wishful
Wishful for a better tomorrow
When you've left from the world
Days are irrelevant
Nights are continuous
The universe has a plan
But it doesn't concern you
For all its conceived complexity
Existence contains only indifference
In the end
Infants are wiser than us all
They see how the world is
We see how its "should" be

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Gabriella Sizemore

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The Land of Broken Dedications

Embarrassment walks a long way down the road
Trying to escape from spilled mistakes she had sowed
Along came a man with buttercup flowers and velvet trousers
He's taking her hand
To lead her to the land

The land of broken dedications
Where all the stars are gone
And there are no more hopeful dawns
Where cotton candy skies
Turn to scarlet red lies
And your heart's forever cold
Because it tells you it's has to be sold

Confusion gets in her faulty car
She says she's gonna take us real far
But she gets lost on the way
And we've got a toll to pay
To get into this land

The land of broken dedications
Where music sounds like nails on a chalkboard
Cause the girls who never come home play the chords
Where your thoughts don't belong to you
Cause everybody's got a few
And milking your misery
Won't give you the big brass key

Failure's got a lot of lessons to spread
Remnants of his shattered crown are stuck atop his head
He gets slapped across the face
By the funny lady cloaked in her true love's taste
She's from the land

The land of broken dedications
A place of broken-hearted games
Where the vagabond covered in shame still can't be tamed
We can watch the lost and the found
While the people burrow deep into the ground
When the brittle boy full of broken dedications
Declares his land is gone.

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Emilee Caudill

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Mom

I am laying in bed with my mother
Her bright eyes welcome me
The picture of health
My fathers dream
I stare at her as she drifts to sleep
Silk nightgown under wool robe
An unspoken peace
A love as pure as these white sheets
From the mirror she faces
I see everything I want to be

Newness

I always smiled afterwards,
like our conversation had magical
powers that captured my attention
and stole my lips.
Talking to him sparked in me
something new something rebellious
that I desired.
I was hidden
from pain and those who brought
fear. But *pitter-patter*
fluttered my heart from his
voice that rattled deep, deep inside.
Then the next step of love came.
What I had been sheltered from.
The pain that comes with newness,
the kind of ache deep inside,
the sweet hurt and torture,
only a man like him could
provide, freedom bears a
price, this time it was
my innocence. Yet, when
he speaks, I
smile.

Blended

The brain of America is tie-dye
Colorful. Eclectic. Eccentric.
Art flows from the veins
between the coasts
Challenging us with questions
of diversity and importance
Removing the argument
of who is right and what is wrong
Blending every shade
of every color
into one glorious PEACE of art

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