

THE EXHIBIT

By

Chantel Langlinais Carlson

THE EXHIBIT

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SCENE 1

An art gallery exhibit. Before the play opens, images of the featured paintings mentioned in the various scenes throughout the play will appear on large white panels that line the back and side walls of the gallery. During the scenes in which the images are addressed, they will appear individually on these panels. Next to each painting is a red button that the characters will occasionally push to hear an automated voice.

The paintings include: Marie-Denise Villers's Young Woman Drawing, Gustav Klimt's The Kiss, Jane Maria Bowkett's In the Parlor, Edouard Manet's Nana, Pablo Picasso's Le baiser, Mary Cassatt's The Tea, Berthe Morisot's Psyche, Georges Clairin's Sarah Bernhardt in the role of the queen in 'Ruy Blas' by Victor Hugo, Vanessa Beecroft's Piano Americano, Rene Magritte's Los amantes and The Rape, Vanessa Bell's Virginia Woolf, Mary Cassatt's In the Loge, Alice Neel's Self-Portrait, Charles West Cope's The Council of the Royal Academy Selecting Pictures for Exhibition.

There is a main performance space, center, as well as two platforms with stepladders located among audience members. On each platform there is a pair of headphones. The characters will move about the performance space as if they are wandering through an exhibit. Audience members should be allowed to sit or stand throughout the gallery. After the play is over, they will be encouraged to move about the "exhibit."

ELENA enters. She walks around the gallery and then sits down in the main performance space, directly in front of Marie-Denise Villers's Young Woman Drawing. There are charcoals and large white tablets

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scattered throughout the gallery floor. She picks up one of the tablets and the charcoals and begins to draw. She repeatedly looks out at the audience. After a couple of minutes, she puts her tablet and charcoals down and walks over toward the people in the audience. She looks at them, pauses, walks, and sits down. She continues to draw. VINCENT enters from the back of the room. Elena looks up from her drawing.

ELENA. Where have you been?

VINCENT. My umbrella is dripping all over the floor.

ELENA. What took you so long?

VINCENT. I couldn't find a place to park. *(Looks around.)* What do I do with this?

ELENA. Just put it by the door. No one's going to take it. *(Vincent walks over to the door, puts his umbrella away, and returns.)* What do you want to do first?

VINCENT. You mean there's more than one?

ELENA. There are three different exhibits.

VINCENT. You didn't tell me that. *(Pause.)* How long's this going to take?

ELENA. Do you have something better to do?

VINCENT. Do you have to ask?

ELENA. *(Pause.)* I want to stay in here. I think the interactive part is fun.

VINCENT. I'd rather interact with a beer. *(Elena and Vincent walk around looking at the various images of paintings projected on the walls. Elena stops in front of Gustav Klimt's painting The Kiss.)*

ELENA. Looks painful.

VINCENT. What?

ELENA. *(Points to the painting.)* That.

VINCENT. Kissing?

ELENA. Her neck. *(Pause.)* I could never pose like that. *(Pause.)* Remember our first kiss?

VINCENT. No.

ELENA. Under the tree?

VINCENT. No.

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ELENA. In the rain?

VINCENT. It was raining?

ELENA. Yes.

VINCENT. I thought our first kiss was in the back seat of my parents' car.

ELENA. No!

VINCENT. Are you sure?

ELENA. I wouldn't have kissed you with your parents in the front seat.

VINCENT. I didn't say they were *in* the car.

ELENA. Well, I wouldn't have let you kiss me for the first time in the backseat of *any* car.

VINCENT. You did later on.

ELENA. Not at first.

VINCENT. I don't remember.

ELENA. *(Pause.)* You have to be the most unromantic person I know.

VINCENT. I just dropped you off by the door so you wouldn't get wet. *(Pause. Elena and Vincent look at the painting.)*

ELENA. I like this one. You can see both the real and unreal.

VINCENT. Yeah.

ELENA. You can see the body parts and their faces, but you also see the texture of the gold.

VINCENT. Yeah. They look like they're kneeling on the same place, but his part is green and hers is gold.

ELENA. I like that. Except for one thing.

VINCENT. What?

ELENA. It looks like she's about to fall off of a cliff.

VINCENT. I didn't notice.

ELENA. Not a very safe place to kiss if you ask me.

VINCENT. You have to be in a safe place to kiss someone?

ELENA. No. Remember when we kissed on the edge of that cliff?

VINCENT. What cliff?

ELENA. In Amalfi.

VINCENT. When?

ELENA. Last summer. *(Long pause.)* Never mind.

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VINCENT. Just give me a second. *(Pause.)* Yes.

ELENA. You do?

VINCENT. Yes.

ELENA. *(Pause.)* What was I wearing?

VINCENT. Come on. I don't even remember what *I* was wearing.

ELENA. A blue shirt and khakis.

VINCENT. *(Pause.)* What do you think of the background?

ELENA. Looks like stars.

VINCENT. I think it looks more like gold rain.

ELENA. That, too.

VINCENT. *(Pause.)* His neck is really long.

ELENA. I didn't notice.

VINCENT. It's like that creature in *The Abyss*.

ELENA. Except he isn't see-through.

VINCENT. He has more hair than Ed Harris, too.

ELENA. *Everyone* has more hair than Ed Harris. *(Pause.)* You could play checkers on his jacket.

VINCENT. Or chess.

ELENA. Right.

VINCENT. I like her swirls.

ELENA. A nice contrast to his checkers.

VINCENT. And their torsos blend together.

ELENA. That's the point.

VINCENT. Because they're lovers.

ELENA. Right. We're good at this. *(Pause.)* Do you want some wine?

VINCENT. Do they have any?

ELENA. They always have wine at these openings.

VINCENT. Where?

ELENA. I think I saw some around the corner. *(Elena sees a red button on the wall.)* What's this?

VINCENT. A button.

ELENA. I know that. What's it for?

VINCENT. Push it. *(Elena keeps pushing the button.)* Push it.

ELENA. I *am* pushing it!

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VINCENT. You broke it.

ELENA. I didn't break it. It was already broken. (*Lights fade on Elena and Vincent as they continue to argue. After they exit, a WOMAN'S VOICE is heard.*)

WOMAN'S VOICE. Good evening, and welcome to the exhibit. We are glad you could join us. We invite you to enjoy the paintings at your own leisure. Next to some of the stations you will find props that you can use to interact with the paintings, but feel free to use your own imaginations. We hope you enjoy your time here, and as always, come again soon. If you need further assistance, just push the little red buttons. Thank you.

SCENE 2

Lights on Elena and Vincent. They are eating hors d'oeuvres and drinking wine.

ELENA. I can't tell what this is.

VINCENT. What?

ELENA. This. I can't tell what's in it.

VINCENT. Let me try. (*He takes the hors d'oeuvre from Elena.*) I think it's chicken.

ELENA. What's in it?

VINCENT. I think it's curry.

ELENA. It's really good.

VINCENT. Did you try the cheese?

ELENA. I tried the blue cheese.

VINCENT. I just took one bite. It was too rich.

ELENA. It was rich, but it was good. How did they get the other one to swirl like that?

VINCENT. I'm not sure.

ELENA. Looked like a cone. (*Pause.*) What do you want to do first?

VINCENT. We could go back to the first painting.

ELENA. Alright. (*Elena and Vincent walk back over to the Klimt painting.*)

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VINCENT. What are we supposed to do?

ELENA. I'm not sure. I just know we're supposed to interact with it somehow.

VINCENT. Like those virtual tours? I just saw a new one on TV where you go into this really big pod and it takes you to Mars.

ELENA. I highly doubt that's what they meant.

VINCENT. Push the butt...never mind, I'll do it.

ELENA. I know how to push a button.

VINCENT. You broke the last one.

ELENA. Vincent. *(Vincent pushes the button.)*

WOMAN'S VOICE. This is Gustav Klimt's *The Kiss*. Lawrence Ferlinghetti's "Short Story on a Painting of Gustav Klimt" was inspired by this painting. He wrote: "They are kneeling upright on a flowered bed. He has just caught her there and holds her still. Her gown has slipped down off her shoulder...His dark head bends to hers hungrily. And the woman, the woman turns her tangerine lips from his one hand like the head of a dead swan draped down over his heavy neck...Her eyes are closed like folded petals. She will not open. He is not the One." *(Elena and Vincent listen for a while. As Elena continues to listen, Vincent begins to take the position of the painting. He places Elena next to him, puts his hands on her neck, and twists it towards the audience.)*

ELENA. Ouch!

VINCENT. You complain I'm not romantic enough. You complain I don't kiss you enough. You . . .

ELENA. Fine. *(Vincent and Elena struggle to position themselves like the couple in the painting. They hold the pose briefly.)* This isn't working. *(Pause.)* I have a cramp. In my toe. *(Pause.)* Thank God it's not a Picasso.

VINCENT. A swan.

ELENA. What?

VINCENT. Lawrence Ferlinghetti said her neck is "like the head of a dead swan."

ELENA. Her neck's being compared to a dead bird?

VINCENT. Weren't you listening?

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ELENA. That's gross.

VINCENT. Why can't you just enjoy this kiss?

ELENA. Ask Ferlinghetti.

VINCENT. What?

ELENA. "She / will not open / He is not the One." *(Pause.)* Do you love me?

VINCENT. Do you have to ask? *(Pause.)* Do you?

ELENA. I think so. *(Pause.)* A swan?

VINCENT. A swan.

ELENA. I suppose I can live with that. I suppose I can live with you.

VINCENT. *(Pause.)* But I'm not the one.

ELENA. No. You were never the one.

VINCENT. *(Pause.)* Guess I'll be going then.

ELENA. Fine.

VINCENT. Fine.

ELENA. *(Pause.)* Is it still raining?

VINCENT. I think so.

ELENA. Can we wait until it stops?

VINCENT. With the way it's been this week, we may never leave.

ELENA. *(Pause.)* Maybe we should try another painting. *(Elena and Vincent walk around. They stop in front of Jane Maria Bowkett's painting In the Parlor. Next to this painting is Edouard Manet's Nana. There is a book lying on the floor. Vincent pushes the button.)*

WOMAN'S VOICE. "All women are brought up from the very earliest years in the belief that their ideal of character is the very opposite to that of men; not self-will and government by self-control, but submission and yielding to the control of others. All the moralities tell them that it is the duty of women, and all the current sentimentalities that it is their nature, to live for others, to make complete abnegation of themselves, and to have no life but in their affections."

ELENA. *(Looking at Bowkett's painting.)* Cute little girl.

VINCENT. She is.

ELENA. I love her little leather shoes.

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VINCENT. What was she reading? (*Elena picks the book up off the floor.*) Something fell.

ELENA. Where?

VINCENT. Under the chair.

ELENA. It's her flower.

VINCENT. A bud.

ELENA. Of course. That makes sense.

VINCENT. How?

ELENA. It'll never get the chance to bloom.

VINCENT. (*Pause.*) What was she reading?

ELENA. *Villette.*

VINCENT. Never heard of it.

ELENA. It's the Victorian novel. By Charlotte Bronte. (*Pause.*) You read it last summer.

VINCENT. I've never read that.

ELENA. Yes you did. When we were on vacation. You forgot your book at home, and I lent you mine.

VINCENT. Oh yeah...the one I read one page of on the toilet and...

ELENA. Never mind. (*Elena flips through the pages.*) Oh, the gallery scene. It's one of my favorites. (*Elena reads from the book.*) "One day, at a quiet early hour, I found myself nearly alone in a certain gallery, wherein one particular picture of pretentious size, set up in the best light, having a cordon of protection stretched before it, and a cushioned bench duly set in front for the accommodation of worshipping connoisseurs...this picture, I say, seemed to consider itself the queen of the collection. It represented a woman, considerably larger, I thought, than the life...She ought likewise to have worn decent garments; a gown covering her properly, which was not the case..." (*Elena continues to read for a brief moment. She puts the book down and walks over to Edouard Manet's Nana and looks at the painting.*)

VINCENT. "What are you doing here?"

ELENA. "But, sir, I am amusing myself."

VINCENT. "Amusing yourself! And at what, if you please? But first, do me the favor of rising; take my arm, and let us cross to the other side...Permit me to conduct you to your party."

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ELENA. “I have no party.”

VINCENT. “You are alone?”

ELENA. “Yes, monsieur.”

VINCENT. “Did you come here unaccompanied?”

ELENA. Yes.

VINCENT. And you were told to look at that painting?

ELENA. “By no means: I found it out for myself.”

VINCENT. “How dare you, a young person, sit coolly down, with self-possession of a garçon, and look at *that* picture?”

ELENA. “...I cannot at all see why I should not look at it.”

VINCENT. “Bon! Bon! Speak no more of it. But you ought not to be here alone.”

ELENA. I shall do as I please. (*Long pause.*)

VINCENT. Where’s the bathroom?

ELENA. What?

VINCENT. The bathroom.

ELENA. (*Flipping through the book.*) Where does he say that?

VINCENT. No, I need to...

ELENA. Oh. Around the corner.

VINCENT. I’ll be back. (*Fade.*)

SCENE 3

Lights on Elena. She pushes the button next to Bowkett’s painting.

WOMAN’S VOICE. The first time it became clear to me was when I read *The Awakening*. The tragedy wasn’t her death. The tragedy was the way she was forced to live her life. She was trapped into being the good wife and mother. She had needs of her own. The only place she felt truly free, truly alive, was swimming naked in the weightlessness of the ocean. (*Pause.*) I find myself in similar situations. My whole life I’ve been raised to be the perfect girl. The one who stands in front of a window to see whether or not she needs a slip before going out. But for once, just once, I’d like to step out and let the light shine down the

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contour of my thighs, the curve of my calves. Because that choice is mine to make. *(Pause.)* The picture reveals: cuffed wrist lace / sashed blue waist / And I become addicted to them. A variety of lenses / now displaced / placed me inside / photographic frames / inside a narrative construct / I can no longer explain.

The ideal image is only a myth. *(Fade.)*

SCENE 4

Lights on Elena and Vincent. They walk over to Pablo Picasso's Le baiser.

ELENA. How am I supposed to do that? *(Vincent begins to look around.)* What are you doing?

VINCENT. Looking for some of those glasses where the eyes dangle and bounce around.

ELENA. Vincent, they wouldn't have those here.

VINCENT. What do you suggest then?

ELENA. Let's try a different one. *(She points to Mary Cassatt's painting The Tea. They sit down and mirror the pose in the painting. Long pause.)*

VINCENT. Why do women do that?

ELENA. What?

VINCENT. Lift their pinkies when they drink tea. *(Pause.)* Maybe the pinky is more sensitive than the other fingers. It might burn. *(Lifts up his hand.)* I had the tip of my pinky removed when I was twelve. I had this really bad wart that wouldn't go away. *(Pause.)* I usually tell girls that I was on a hunting trip and had an encounter with a wild bear...and that he grabbed my hand and ripped off the tip of my pinky.

ELENA. I'm supposed to believe that?

VINCENT. Yes.

ELENA. That a wild bear would take your hand and only rip off the tip of your pinky.

VINCENT. Could happen.

ELENA. Right.

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VINCENT. Did you see *Grizzly Man*?

ELENA. You're not dead!

VINCENT. I could've died.

ELENA. From a bleeding *pinky*?

VINCENT. There was a lot of blood. *(Pause.)* Do you have any Italian in you?

ELENA. Yes.

VINCENT. Oh. *(Pause.)* You're supposed to say no. *(Pause.)* You're supposed to say no when I ask you that.

ELENA. I heard you the first time.

VINCENT. The other girls say no. I ask, "Do you have any Italian in you?" They say no. Then I say, "Do you want some?"

ELENA. Is this before or after the bear-severed pinky story?

VINCENT. Before. *(Pause.)* That's how I met my wife. *(Pause.)* The first one. The second one didn't really care for that too much. Her dad was killed by an Italian hit man. She started crying in the middle of the restaurant. Although it could've been the Pukiny song playing.

ELENA. Puccini.

VINCENT. Sorry?

ELENA. It's Puccini, not Pukiny. *(Pause.)*

VINCENT. Well, I guess I should be going. *(Pause.)* It sure was nice talking to you. *(Pause.)* Do you come here often? *(Pause.)* I could stop by same time tomorrow if you're interested.

ELENA. I'm not. *(Long pause.)*

VINCENT. What did I do wrong?

ELENA. Where do I even begin?

VINCENT. How should I know how to pick up women? We've been married so long, I've forgotten.

ELENA. Vincent, do you really think a woman would believe that bear story?

VINCENT. I thought it was pretty creative.

ELENA. You saw that on the Discovery Channel.

VINCENT. She wouldn't know that.

ELENA. It's ridiculous! *(Pause.)* And you know very well it's Puccini. How many times have I played that CD?

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VINCENT. I try to block it out. Damn oh mio pampino...

ELENA. O Mio Babbino Caro.

VINCENT. Whatever.

ELENA. It's a beautiful song.

VINCENT. It was the first time. Now every time we go to The Olive Garden it's playing. And then I have to go home and hear it playing there, too.

ELENA. *(Pause.)* We haven't been there in while.

VINCENT. They need more steak.

ELENA. I think one of the meals has steak in it.

VINCENT. No, I mean big steak. The kind that covers your plate and the juices are...

ELENA. It's an Italian restaurant.

VINCENT. So?

ELENA. So if you want steak, go to the steakhouse.

VINCENT. You won't let me.

ELENA. What are you talking about?

VINCENT. You said it was too expensive.

ELENA. Which one?

VINCENT. The one I took you to for your birthday.

ELENA. The one on the corner?

VINCENT. Yeah.

ELENA. I took you there for *your* birthday. And it *was* too expensive.

VINCENT. Fine. Take me to Waffle House next time.

ELENA. I just think it was a rip off. All we got for a hundred bucks were two steaks and a couple glasses of wine.

VINCENT. I liked my steak.

ELENA. Didn't even come with a salad. Or bread. *(Pause.)* Would you really try to pick up a woman by telling her you were married twice?

VINCENT. I thought it would make me look more attractive.

ELENA. Being married twice does *not* make you more attractive.

VINCENT. What if I was widowed?

ELENA. That would've been better.

VINCENT. *(Pause.)* It's a bit overrated if you ask me.

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ELENA. Dying?

VINCENT. Falling for the widowed person.

ELENA. I don't think so.

VINCENT. No?

ELENA. No.

VINCENT. How many times a week do you watch *Sleepless in Seattle*?

ELENA. I don't watch it every week.

VINCENT. Every time I came into the den this week you were watching it.

ELENA. That's all that was on.

VINCENT. Every night?

ELENA. *TBS* repeats good movies a lot.

VINCENT. Good enough to watch every night?

ELENA. Yes. *(Pause.)* How many times did you watch *Grizzly Man* this week?

VINCENT. I keep waiting to see if they'd show them being eaten by the bear.

ELENA. They *never* do.

VINCENT. I thought there might've been some lost footage.

ELENA. *(Pause.)* I feel sorry for them.

VINCENT. Do you think he went for the neck or the torso first? Actually, he might've just whacked the shit outta them with his paw.

ELENA. I meant the Victorian women.

VINCENT. Oh. What's there to feel sorry for? They got to sit around and drink tea all day.

ELENA. I'm not a big fan of tea.

VINCENT. No.

ELENA. Especially with milk.

VINCENT. Who puts milk in their tea?

ELENA. The English.

VINCENT. Why?

ELENA. Same reason we put milk in our coffee.

VINCENT. I don't like milk in my coffee.

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ELENA. I know you don't. I'm just saying. *(Pause. Elena looks at the Cassatt painting.)* Those can't be comfortable.

VINCENT. What?

ELENA. Corsets.

VINCENT. How do you know she has one on?

ELENA. They always have one on.

VINCENT. I don't see it.

ELENA. It's there.

VINCENT. Those are sexy.

ELENA. Do you know how uncomfortable those are?

VINCENT. When did you ever wear a corset?

ELENA. In the burlesque show.

VINCENT. I never saw you in a burlesque show.

ELENA. It was a long time ago.

VINCENT. So why did you make me return the one I got you for your birthday?

ELENA. It was *edible*. *(Elena picks up the corset that is sitting by the painting.)*

VINCENT. What are you doing?

ELENA. Come here.

VINCENT. Why?

ELENA. *(She hands him a corset.)* Put this on.

VINCENT. You're *not* putting that on me.

ELENA. Come on. It's art for art's sake.

VINCENT. Fine. But don't you dare tell anyone about this.

ELENA. Take off your shirt.

VINCENT. Why do I have to take off my shirt?

ELENA. You can put it back on after I'm finished.

VINCENT. Just put it on top.

ELENA. Then everyone will be able to see it.

VINCENT. Does it matter at this point?

ELENA. *(Elena starts to lace up the corset.)* Now take a deep breath. And release.

VINCENT. Come on!

ELENA. Again.

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VINCENT. That's enough!

ELENA. Almost done. *(Pause.)* There. Turn around. *(Vincent turns.)* You look cute. *(Vincent looks down.)*

VINCENT. I have cleavage. You gave me cleavage. *(Pause.)* And what are you going to do?

ELENA. I'll be over here. Sitting in the chair. Watching. *(Before sitting down, Elena pushes the red button.)*

WOMAN'S VOICE. "No eye is innocent: the intelligent eye is always editing, contextualizing, framing, comparing, and contrasting – dressing its object up or down – and, therefore, no artwork can be isolated from these activities, themselves prelude to or part of the act of interpreting."
(Long pause. Fade.)

SCENE 5

Lights on Elena. She is standing in front of Berthe Morisot's Psyche. She pushes the button.

WOMAN'S VOICE. I don't even know if I want to go out tonight. I know I'll find myself in the usual scenario. Like last night. I'm talking to a friend, and a man comes up to us. He asks me my name. I tell him. He says he's a doctor. I ask in what. He proceeds to count to five with his fingers. I'm supposed to know what this is. I try to guess. Math? No, that's four letters. Science? No that's seven. As he talks to my friend I wonder why he has stood there this long. Why he even bothered to come over in the first place. Before he leaves he gives us the answer: OBGYN. My friend and I return to our conversation. It's not about what we are wearing. It's not about our "ideal" man. When he came up to us we were talking about our dead fathers. About how that's left us to date the kind of people that we do. About how I'm not sure I'll ever meet Mr. Right because that doesn't exist. My father told me he would always be there. I wanted to believe what he told me was the truth. But the real truth is that he died in front of a crowd of strangers at a lunch table. He became a spectacle for people to look at. For people to point

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their fingers at. For people to go home and say, “I saw a man die at lunch today.” He is not for their amusement. I am not for their amusement. I want to bury those memories. In the closet. Under the bed. Behind a wall. Never to be seen again. I wash off the cigarette smoke from my hair and face and go to bed. Just another night out on the town. But I think that one night it might get better than this. That one night someone will prove me wrong. One night someone will not leave me here to think about what I’ve missed, whom I miss, and where I’m going. Because as much as my friends miss a moment of peace and quiet, that quiet deafens me late at night and keeps me awake. Staring at the wall. The ceiling. The pillowcase. I only hope my dreams tonight are good ones. *(Elena stands and listens for a while. Then she walks over to one of the platforms and tries out various poses. When the Woman’s Voice stops, Vincent enters.)*

VINCENT. There you are. *(Elena turns around and holds the pose in George Clairin’s painting Sarah Bernhardt in the role of the queen in ‘Ruy Blas.’ Fade.)*

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