

# At The Sign of the Dancing Donkey



Mercedes Dannenberg

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The short story you are about to read is an original parody of a portion of J R R Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*.

This is a sizzling rollercoaster of a novelette with lots of violent action, stark terror and a really *HOT* Hobbit babe thrown in for free. The story is very loosely based on chapter IX of Book One of J R R Tolkien's *The Fellowship of the Ring* and recounts what really happened to four very silly Hobbits at the village of Bree. Unlike Tolkien's Hobbits, these characters are utter pants and bear no relationship to any fictitious person, living, dead, or undead. Now read on!

Mercedes Dannenberg has written several Tolkien parodies of which this story is by far the most scurrilous and silly. The interested reader can find these tales on the Internet at :

<http://www.utterpants.co.uk/hobbits/hobbits.html>.

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THE UTTERPANTS TOLKIEN PARODIES

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## *At the Sign of the Dancing Donkey*

It was dark when four tired Hobbits cycled over the last railway-crossing and drew near to the village of Bree, in Buckland. They came to the East-gate, but found it shut. Then they tried the South-Gate, and found that shut too.

“Why don’t we twy the Norf Gate?” lisped Perry Pantypluck, adjusting the crotch of his bright yellow trousers, as he dismounted from his bicycle.

“Because there isn’t one,” snapped Fido.

“Drat it, Mr Fido, Sir,” complained a short, fat Hobbit with exceptionally furry feet. “Didn’t I say we should ‘ave taken the train?”

“How many times do I have to tell you *not* to call me ‘Mr Fido’. We’re supposed to be traveling incognito, Jam Spongee. If any name must be given, it’s ‘Underpants’ — have you forgotten?”

“No, but begging your pardon Mr Fa— I mean master,” blustered Jam Spongee, “the wizard’s Underpants simply don’t fit a respectable, gentlehobbit like you, and it was powerful cruel of Mr Randolf to insist you put ‘em on, so to speak.”

“Not as cruel as this confounded saddle,” said Fido. “My bottom is killing me. But it can’t be helped: the train is the first place the Enemy would look for us”.

“I thought so, too,” said Stingo, a handsome, rather effeminate-looking Hobbit in tight leather pants. He ran his hand playfully over Fido’s firm young bottom as he bent down to adjust his bicycle chain. “And it’s *sooo* romantic cycling by moonlight.”

“There’s something very fishy about that Stingo,” muttered Jam to himself. “Taint nat’ral for a Hobbit to be so thin, nor so good lookin neither’, nor to wear such tight, leather riding britches, whether they wears well or no. “If he takes liberties with Mr Fido, *I’ll kill him*”.

Fido mounted his bicycle and led them toward the West-Gate. One of the Big Folk was loitering outside as they arrived. “What do you want at this time of night?” he asked gruffly.

“We have reservations at the inn here,” answered Fido.

“Hobbits! Three Hobbits out of the Shire! And what’s more, one of ‘em’s wearing some pretty hot cycling pants,” muttered the Gatekeeper to himself. He stared brazenly at Stingo for a moment, and then opened the gate just far enough so that Stingo would have to squeeze past him to get in. Perry was disgusted to see the strapping, lithe-limbed firm-buttocked, young Hobbit rub his codpiece against Fido’s leg, and kicked the door open to separate them. “If he takes

liberties with Mr Fido, Jam will kill him”, he muttered to himself.

“We don’t often see Shire Hobbits on the road at night,” continued the Gatekeeper. “They usually takes the 8.48 from Crickhollow. Or the 12.25 Weathertop express. Or the slow train from Farthingstone to Deephollow which connects with the 14.40 to Buckleberry Ferry — unless it’s late; in which case they’d ‘ave to wait two hours for the 17.20 which only goes as far as Straddle. Then again, there are no trains at all to Bree from Buckleberry on Mondays, on account of Monday being the Sherrif’s birthday. But as you’re from the Shire, and it’s a Monday, you’d know that...”

“We DON’T LIKE TRAINS!”, snapped Fido.

“You don’t say, Mr —?”

“— They’re draughty and full of smelly old men in dirty raincoats”, interrupted Stingo.

“Is that a fact, Mr —?”

“And they *don’t* serve ‘ot mushrooms”, added Jam peevishly.

“Don’t they — Mr?”

“And the toilet seats are wearily filfy”, added Perry.

“Are they now? Then you’ll pardon me for asking what four such particular Hobbits want in Bree on a cold, Monday night — Mr, Mister..?”

Fido gripped his sword. “A gentlehobbit’s name and business are his own, private property,” he retorted haughtily.

“Just as you like, Sir,” sneered the Gatekeeper, casting a suspicious eye over their bulging rucksacks. “I’m sure it’s no business of mine if you’re carrying a little more cash than is wise in these parts, or perhaps one of you is concealing some valuables about his person?”

Fido gasped, and tightened his grip on his sword.

Jam stifled an exclamation and gripped his bicycle handlebars.

Perry just gripped the crotch of his bright yellow trousers.

“I might be...” began Stingo, coquettishly. “But you’ll never guess where I keep them”.

“Let me try,” said the Gatekeeper mockingly, scratching his head. “It wouldn’t ‘ave anything to do with that enormous codpiece you’ve got strapped to your riding breeches, would it?”

“It might,” giggled Stingo.

“Well in that case, young master, I think I shall leave it where it is. I’m not sure I fancy the thought of handling valuables as have been in an Hobbit’s pants.”

“Shut up, Stingo!” hissed Fido.

Stingo apoloigised and wondered for the umpteenth time why the handsome, strapping Hobbit hadn’t made a pass at him. “After all,” he said to himself, “It isn’t as if I haven’t given him enough opportunities. I’ve been coming on to him ever since we left Fag End, and the closest I’ve got to a feel was when we fell off our bicycles in the woods. But if I make the first move, Jam Spongee will kill me”.

Fido laid his hand on his sword and squared up to the Gatekeeper: “Will you let us in?”

“Without names you’d best find somewhere else to sleep tonight.”

“Underpants,” said Fido, quietly.

“Beg your pardon, Sir?”

“*Underpants*,” repeated Fido, slightly louder.



“Did you say ‘Underpants?’”

“YES! UNDERPANTS!”

“Now — look her Mr —”

“No! ‘Underpants’ is my name,” said Fido with a grimace. “Mr Underpants of Bywater”.

“Really?”

“Yes, really”.

“And I suppose your three companions would be ‘Mr Shortpants’, ‘Mr Longpants’ and ‘Mr Thinpants’?”

“No.” said Fido, pointing to Jam Spongee. “This is my manservant, Mr Jam Underfoot of Overhill, that is Mr Perry Pantypluck of Longbottom, and this is Master Stingo Shortfoot of Hobbiton”.

“And fine, Hobbit names they be, too,” said the Gatekeeper, “apart from ‘Pantypluck.”

“His mother was in Lingerie for many years.” explained Fido.

“You don’t say?” retorted the Gatekeeper. “I don’t have a problem with ‘Pantypluck’ — it’s ‘Underpants’ that bothers me”.

“Have you twied washing them at forty dwegees?” suggested Perry.

“Or stretching them over the handlebars of a bicycle?” added Stingo.

“Pipe down, both of you!” rapped Fido.

“Yes, put a cork in it!” added Jam, giving Stingo a sharp slap on his curvaceous leather-clad bottom.

“Ouch - that hurt!”

“You’ll get more than a slap if you don’t stop acting the fool, my lad.”

“Promise?” retorted the pert Hobbit with a pout.

Jam scowled at Stingo, and wondered, not for the first time, why Randolf had insisted they take the young Hobbit with them. ‘What use will he be?’ he’d asked the Wizard. ‘He can cook, and sew and cycle, and he’ll be company for Fido when all other company avails nothing.’ ‘But I’m Mr Fido’s manservant!’ he’d retorted, hotly. ‘I’ve always done for Mr Fido since he were a lad.’ ‘Stingo can do things for your master that would be impossible for you,’ the Wizard had replied mysteriously. ‘What things?’ Jam had wanted to know. ‘You’ll see’ was the only reply he’d received. And with that he’d been content. But now he was getting really cheesed off with the mincing ninny. “*If he takes liberties with Mr Fido, I’ll kill him*”, he muttered. He kicked Stingo’s bicycle over, and squared up to the Gatekeeper.

“Now look ere, whatever-your-name-is,” he began, adopting the tone he used to avoid paying for more than one round in the ‘Blue Tit’, in Bywater. “Taint right to keep us awaiting out here in the cold night air, because my master has a name that amuses you. We’re respectable Hobbits, so don’t E start treating us like some no good, bicycle thieves!”

“The name’s Barmy — Phil Barmy, and I’m glad it’s not Underpants,” said the Gatekeeper. “You’re names are your own, no doubt, but you’ll find there’s others in Bree who might be very interested in your Underpants”

“What do you mean?” asked Fido sharply.

“You’ll find out, soon enough.”

“Will you let us in now?” demanded Jam.

Barmy puckered up his thin lips and spat out a mouthful of tobacco juice. “By all means, but you’ll find there’s queerer folk at the *Donkey* than your Master

Stingo, and not all of ‘em’s as friendly!”

With that, Barmy swung the gate wide, and stepped aside. But, as he pedaled away, Fido could see that the Gatekeeper was eyeing Stingo curiously. He wondered, not for the first time, why he found Stingo so disturbingly attractive. What was it the young lad reminded him of? Why did his touch send thrilling shivers down his tights? What was Randolph’s real reason for insisting he accompany them? Why did fried fushrooms always land buttered side down? He was certain Stingo had the hots for him. Why else would the lad have groped him when they fell off their bicycles in the woods? Fido was ashamed to admit he’d enjoyed the touch of those slim, inquisitive fingers. *But If he takes liberties with me, Jam will kill him!*

Presently the Hobbits pulled up in front of the inn. Jam leaned on his handlebars and stared up at its ugly rain-streaked concrete walls and rows and rows of dirty windows, and felt his stout, Hobbit heart sink into his feet. He had imagined himself draining a quiet pint or three of foaming ale in a snug little half-timbered Hobbit burrow, and here was what looked like a third-rate knocking shop which probably served second rate beer! He pictured painted floozies standing in the yard all dressed in black lace, and evil-smelling pimps peering out of the red-lit upper windows.

“We’re surely not putting up here for the night are we, Mr Fa — Mr Underpants, are we?”

“What’s wrong with it?” asked Fido. “Randolf recommended it personally.”

“I expect it’s cosier than it looks on the outside,” said Perry, dismounting from his bicycle. Stingo pulled up alongside Fido, and as he bent down to take off his bicycle clips, Fido’s eyes were involuntarily drawn to the leather cycling pants stretched tightly over the young Hobbit’s firm, round bottom.

“If those pants were any shinier, I swear I could see myself in them,” he said softly.

“I wish...” said Stingo, blowing Fido a kiss..

“The filthy pervert!” muttered Jam under his breath, and wondered if Fido knew Stingo had the hots for him. “His chest is too well-developed for a Hobbit in his tweens and those tight leather riding pants are really pervy. “If he takes any liberties with Mr Fido, *I’ll kill him*, so ‘elp me!”

They wheeled their bicycles through a wide arch and left them leaning up against a lamp post. Fido led the way across a shadowy courtyard, and halted before a large doorway flanked by two rearing donkeys carved in stone. The door was open and a welcoming light streamed out to greet them. Above the door swung an illuminated neon sign whose florid, pink letters announced: *The Dancing Donkey by Burleyman Butterbore*. Fido stepped forward, and was nearly knocked down by a gangling man with a shock of bright red hair and a thin, pinched face. He was all elbows and knees, and was bustling out of one door and in through another with a tray laden with plates of fried bacon and mushrooms.

“Ah — that’s better!” said Jam.

“Can we —” began Fido.

“Alf a mo, mate!” shouted the man breezily and vanished into the lounge-bar. In a moment he was back again, rubbing his thin, knotted hands together expectantly.

“Evenin’, gents!” he said, bending double to address them. “What can do?”

“I beg your pardon?” said Fido, unaccustomed to the man’s dialect.

“What-can-we-do-for-you-me-old-mucker?” repeated the man.

“Oh! Bed and breakfast for four please — Mr Butterbore is it?”

“Burleyman’s the name; inkeepin’s the game, squire,” said the man with a nod and a wink.

“We have reservations.”

“In?”

“Pardon?” asked Fido.

“In-what-names?”

“Fag-F-Underpants,” stammered Fido.

“Fag Funderpants?” said the man, straightening up in surprise and running his fingers through his untidy hair. “Now what does that remind me of..?”

“OH, NOT AGAIN!” said Jam and Perry in unison.

“My name is Underpants,” said Fido wearily.

“Not Fag Funderpants?”

“No — just Underpants.”

“Or Thunderpants?”

“No!”

“Sure?”

“Yes.”

“Because I wouldn’t want to be responsible for you missing any important messages on account of my getting your name wrong, now would I, squire?”

“Do you have a message for me?” asked Fido in alarm.

“Not if your name’s Thunderpants”.

“It’s Underpants!”

“So you keep saying, squire. But you could be anyone. There’s queer folk abroad tonight and I can’t be too careful.”

“I TELL YOU MY NAME IS UNDERPANTS AND I HAVE A RESERVATION!” yelled Fido

“Alright — keep your ‘air on, squire. Let me check.” The innkeeper rushed off and came back clutching a dog-eared note book.

“Underpants, you say?”

“Yes”

“Not Fag Funderpants? There’s a bookin’ ‘ere for a Miss Fag Funderpants...or it might be Thunderpants; there’s a bit of egg got stuck on it, so it’s ‘ard to be sure..”

“Do I look like a woman?”

“No... but your young mate looks like he could pass for one if ‘e swapped the leather pants for a nice gingham frock —”

“I’ve ‘ad about enough o’ your sauce, my good man!” began Jam roughly. “You’d better find us our rooms double quick, or you’ll have Jam Spongee to deal with!”

“Alright, alright — ‘ang on a mo... ah ‘ere it is: *‘Underpants & Co. One parlor and one bed. Separate barf. Smokin’ preferred. See attached note from Wizard Randolph’*. I knew I’d ‘eard the name Underpants before...”

“What does the note say?” asked Fido.

“What note?”

“That one that’s attached.”

“It aint.”

“Isn’t what?”

“Attached.”

“Where is it, then?”

“No idea, squire, Marge must’ve put it somewhere for safe-keepin’, or maybe the cat ‘ad it.”

“Marge?”

“The missus, guv. Meggot Butterbore”.

“Then why do you call her ‘Marge?’”

“Cos she spreads so easily,” replied Butterbore with a coase laugh.

“Disgusting!” muttered, Perry.

“Well when ‘Marge’ finds it, or the cat brings it up, perhaps you’ll let me know,” said Fido, testily. “It might be important. Now can we see our rooms please?”

“Of course, guv — Hi Marge! MARGE, you idle baggage!” he shouted.

“Coming Burley!” A rosy-cheeked woman shot out of a door and came to a skidding halt at their feet, wiping her hands on her apron.

“Take this tray into the lounge bar and be quicker about it than you was gettin’ ‘ere, woman!” bellowed the Innkeeper. “Follow me, gents, we ‘ave some nice, snug burrows in the Norf wing built special like for ‘obbits. On the ground floor as they prefer; on-suite mushroom-fryin’ facilities as they like it. Nice big bedroom for four. I’m sure your party will be comfy. This way now!”

He led them down several winding passages, and opened a large, round green door. “This is the parlor. The barroom is two doors down the ‘all. ‘Ere is a nice gas ‘ob should you fancy a bite o’ fried mushrooms in the night.”

Stingo and Perry made straight for the bedroom.

“Ugh,” exclaimed Jam, wiping his fingers across the greasy hob.

“Marge must’ve sat on it, Mr Spongee, I’ll get ‘er to clean it,” Butterbore said over his shoulder as he followed the two Hobbits into the bedroom.

“I noticed some dwy wot on the walls,” said Perry.

“Well, Mr Pantypluck, dry rot is as dry rot does as we says in Bree. Stop me if I’m gettin’ too technical.”

“And the beds are a little hard...” complained Stingo, pummeling a mattress.

“And at no extra cost, guv.”

“These sheets are stained,” said Perry.

“That’ll be the Seamen, Sir. They will keep their sou’westers on in bed.”

Jam sniffed the curtains. “Strange smell...”

“Mice, Squire. Marge’ll flush ‘em out while you’re at supper.”

“You really have worked out your patter, haven’t you?” said Fido, sarcastically.

“Not really, guv, this is a different fing. It’s called wit.”

“Where’s the privy?” asked Jam.

“The craftsman who built this wing was a stickler for comfort and simplicity,” replied Butterbore smoothly.

“How thoughtful,” said Stingo.

“That’s all very well, but what about the privy?” repeated Jam.

“Well, squire, what we’re talkin’ about in privy terms is a detached facility wiv open air access.”

“How lovely!” said Stingo.

“Yes - but where *IS* it?” persisted Jam.

“It’s the - er - very latest in outhouse, open-air apertures, wiv a wide capacity gutter installation.”

“You mean we have to piss out of the window?” asked Fido.

“In a nutshell — yes, guv.”

“Well, in that case we’ll take the rooms,” said Fido. “I never could stand those smelly, indoor things.”

“Spiffin’!” said Butterbore. “Do excuse me but I’m that rushed off me feet tonight. What wiv a party of Strollin’ Elves that come in on the 14.40 from Buckleberry yesterday an’ the annual dwarf-tossin’ contest —”

“— Dwarf tossing?” interrupted Perry.

“The guests bet on which dwarf can crack one off the wrist the —”

“Come, again?” asked Perry in bewilderment.

“Don’t ask, Perry, you don’t want to know,” said Fido.

“Marge will bring your supper in two shakes, if you’ll pardon the expression,” continued Butterbore. “Ring the bell if she don’t. With that, the innkeeper rushed out and left the Hobbits to themselves.

Fido sank into a comfortable armchair by the fireplace. Stingo was tempted to sink down on top of him, but thought better of it when he caught sight of Jam’s scowling face. “If that lad takes any liberties with Mr Fido, *I’ll kill him* — so ‘elp me,” muttered the fat Hobbit. What the armchair thought is anybody’s guess.

Perry was about to ring the bell when Marge bustled in with four mugs of foaming ale and a plate of mushrooms and bacon. It was plain fare, but there was plenty for all, and Jam’s earlier misgivings were relieved by the excellence of the beer.

They were just lighting up their pipes when Marge returned and asked them if they’d like to join the company in the lounge bar. “There’s music an’ dwarf tossing and the beer’s three pennorth cheaper than takin’ it in y’ room.”

“What’s ‘Dwarf tossing?’”

“OH, SHUT UP, PERRY!” said the other Hobbits.

That clinched it for Jam. He always was a skinflint when it came to buying a round. Soon they joined the other guests in the large, half-timbered lounge bar. Perry announced he wanted a breath of air. “If you must,” hissed Fido, “but don’t forget we’re supposed to be traveling incognito!”

The gathering was small, but noisy. Butterbore was propping up the bar talking to a scantily-clad Hobbit-lass who kept glancing at Fido from under her long eyelashes. But the Hobbit’s attention was fixed on two red-faced dwarfs who were warming up for the Dwarf Tossing contest and making a great deal of noise about it. Suddenly, he spotted an unsavoury looking character smoking a fat cigar with a crumpled felt hat pulled low over his shifty eyes, sitting in the shadow of the fireplace.

“Who’s that?” he asked Butterbore.

“e’s one o’ them wanderin’ peddlers — Numenorian rug trafficker, more like, by the number of strange packages that arrive for ‘im. He disappears for months on end, and then pops up again with some overdressed floosie ‘angin’ on ‘is arm, an’ a flash new motor-car. Mind you, not that I’m complainin’. He allus pays on time — and ‘ansomely. What ‘is real name is I’ve never ‘eard tell: but ‘es known round ‘ere as Snider.”

“But there’s no accountin’ for tinkers and tossers, as we says ‘ere in Bree, meanin’ the peddlers and Shire ‘obbits. Funny you should ask about ‘im...” But at that moment, a dwarf called for more tissues, and Butterbore’s last remark remained unexplained.

The Hobbits moved away, and Fido found a quiet table where they could remain unobserved.

“Keep your eye on that man,” he said to Stingo. “I don’t like the look of him one bit...”

“I’m none too keen on that trollop by the bar, neither,” said Jam. “If she’s a decent, respectable Hobbitmaid, I’m a turnip.”

No sooner were the words out of his mouth than the lass laughed at something Butterbore said and came over to their table.

“Mr Butterbore was a-wonderin’ if you gents might be a-wantin’ to go upstairs?” she asked in an insinuating voice.

“Why, what’s upstairs?” asked Fido.

The girl winked.

“Is there dancing?” asked Stingo brightly. “I *adore* dancing.”

Jam glared at him.

“You might call it dancin’, Sir,” said the girl, with a coquettish twirl of her dress.

“You mean this is a cheap knocking-shop,” said Fido flatly.

“I don’t know about cheap,” said the girl with a defiant pout. “You don’t fink a few beers and a ‘andful of tossin’ dwarfs pays for the upkeep of this place, do you?”

“Let’s leave, Mr Fa — lets’s leave, Sir.” said Jam primly.

“We can’t leave, Jam, this is the only Inn in Bree.”

“Couldn’t we find a nice respectable Hobbit family to put us up?”

“What’s the hurry, big boy?” she teased Jam, “Don’t e fancy me?”

“Tell her to go away, Mr Fido!”

“Jam!”

“I’m sorry Sir, that floosie’s got me so flustered I clean forgot —”

“— Forgot what?” interrupted the girl inquisitively.

“Never you mind!” retorted Jam.

“Lighten up, Jam,” said Fido with laugh. “She won’t bite you.”

“I might,” she giggled, “If you pays extra..”

Stingo giggled and drew his chair closer to Fido.

“Well — you’re a cute little thing,” said the girl to Stingo. “Wouldn’t you like to come upstairs with me?”

“Yes,” said Fido. “Why don’t you, Stingo. In fact, why don’t you both go upstairs while I have a quiet word with Butterbore about that dratted note he’s mislaid.”

“Me, Sir?” asked Jam, reddening. “I’d never forgive m’self. Nor would my Rosie. You know we plighted our troth last midsummer day. The very idea, Sir!”

“Then you go, Stingo”.

Stingo shook his head vigorously and drew closer to Fido.

The girl pressed her leg against Stingo, hitched up her dress to expose a flash of her red, satin camiknickers, and tossed back her hair. “I’ll warrant that with a codpiece that big you know how to give a girl a good time!”

“Go on, Stingo”, repeated Fido. “You look as if you could do with the relief.”

“Must I, Sir”, said Stingo sulkily. “I’d much rather stay here with you.”

“That would be wise.”

Suddenly Fido was aware that the strange looking man he’d seen earlier was at his elbow, and jumped up in consternation.

“Who are you!” he demanded.

“I am called Snider”, said the stranger in a deep undertone. “And I am very pleased to meet you Mister — Underpants, if Butterbore got your name right.”

“He did”, said Fido stiffly, and shifted uncomfortably under the piercing grey eyes which regarded him.

“Well — Mister — Underpants,” continued Snider softly, “If I were you I would not take up the young woman’s offer. A few beers and a roll in the hay are all very well in their place, but this isn’t the Shire. There are queer folk about, and queerer folk have been through here earlier today asking about the whereabouts of one Fido Faggins!”

Fido started. “How the devil do you know my name?”

“I know a great deal about you — and your mission,” whispered Snider. “If you want to keep them secret I would advise you to take my warning seriously.”

Fido sat down with a bump. “Get lost!” he said to the girl.

“Limped dicked ninnies!” she replied, and flung herself toward the next table where she was soon haranguing three dwarfs with beards so luxuriant, a family of squirrels would have sold their grandmother to call them home.

“Get some more beers in, Jam, there’s a good lad,” said Fido. Jam trotted off to the bar. Fido leaned closer to Snider. Soon he was deep in conversation with the mysterious peddler. “So you know all about IT?”

“*IT?* Oh *THAT*..! Enough to know you are in serious danger now that the Witch-Queen knows you’re here. But I have a fast motor-car stashed in Butterbore’s garage for a quick getaway.”

Fido blanched. “The W-Witch Queen?”

“Yes!” retorted Snider in a strained voice. “Do you want her to find you in some dark alley where there is no one to hear your screams? She is terrible!”

“Then that — that floosie, is in league with her?”

Snider nodded.

Fido’s attention was suddenly distracted by a commotion at the bar. Jam Spongee was giving the locals a colourful account of Bingo’s birthday party. Fido fidgeted uncomfortably as the silly Hobbit launched into a description of the old Hobbit’s vanishing act.

“You’d better do something quick!” hissed Snider in his ear.

Fido jumped onto the table, slipped in a puddle of beer, and came crashing down on top of Stingo.

Stingo squealed with delight and fumbled for Fido’s crotch. Soon, his hand was in Fido’s pants and groping for the precious treasure he’d dreamed of. He gasped as his fingers closed on something hard and shiny. Fido cried out a warning, but it was too late. The two Hobbits vanished before the stranger’s startled gaze.

Fido felt hot and ashamed. Stingo just felt him up as they crawled away into the corner of the room “Stop it!” Whispered Fido, struggling to disentangle himself from the young Hobbit’s embrace. “Jam Spongee will kill you when he finds out.”

“No he won’t, we’re invisible.”

“Invisible or not it’s not natural for us get this friendly,” said Fido. “No good can come of it. Now let go of my ring!”

Stingo started crying.

“Shut up! People will hear us!” hissed Fido.

“I don’t care!” I *DON’T!*” sobbed Stingo. “I love you, Mr — I love you Fido!” The tearful young Hobbit reluctantly let go of the ring, and kissed Fido on the lips.

“Get off me!” said Fido.

“Well?” said Snider, as they re-appeared. “What possessed you to do that? It’s much worse than anything Jam could have said. You’ve put your foot in it now, Fido, or should I say your knob?”

“I don’t know what you mean,” said the blushing Hobbit, hurriedly buttoning up his breeches.

“Oh yes you do!” replied Snider. “Of all the places to hide this thing that was by far the stupidest. You’d better get out of here *NOW* if you want to avoid the tricky questions the company will be asking.”

“Very well,” said Fido in a trembling voice. “We’ll go to our room.”

“That would be best,” said Snider. “I will try to repair the damage you’ve done. But mind — I shall want a few words with you both later!”

“What about Jam?”

“After a few more beers he won’t remember a thing.”

“Oh Fido!” began Stingo when they were safely back in their bedroom. “I am so sorry...”

“It can’t be helped, my lad,” said Fido with a shrug of his shoulders. “A strapping young Hobbit gets very lonely on the road.”

“No, not that,” said Stingo. “I meant slipping your ring off your — you know, your *thing*, and exposing you. I’m not ashamed of feeling you up. I love you!”

“Don’t start that again,” said Fido. “And take your hand off my knee. We are friends, close friends, but we can never be more than that.”

“Oh Fido, darling! How can you be so cruel?”

“Now *LOOK!*” said Fido, grabbing the young Hobbit’s shoulders. “You — you’re... Oh my goodness; how beautiful your eyes are when they’re moist... No! Don’t kiss me again! I won’t have it!”

“Oh, Fido, dearest!”

“*STOP IT.* I want to make it quite clear that I am not interested in the contents of your pants, Stingo.”

“You *might* be if you knew what I kept in them...”

Fido stepped back and held the lad at arm’s length. “I flatter myself that my wide experience of the world has acquainted me with what a Gentlehobbit keeps in his pants,” he said huskily.

“Then prepare to be amazed..”

“Oh no! You don’t have a cute tattoo on your willy with the words, ‘handle with care’, do you?”

“No..”

Stingo took off his belt and slowly started to roll his leather breeches down his thighs.

“Or one of those unfashionable piercings?”



“Certainly not!”

“Please don’t tell me you’ve painted your willy blue and trimmed your bush in the shape of a heart!”

“No, my love.”

“Well, what could it possibly be?”

Stingo stepped out of his breeches and pulled down his pants.

“Prepare yourself for a shock”

“OH-MY-GOODNESS!”

Half an hour later Fido was lying naked in Stingo’s arms, his lips brushing the young Hobbit’s fun-sized breasts.

“Now I know why you seemed so familiar,” he said. “I can’t imagine why I didn’t see through your disguise.”

“It was hell strapping my tits up every morning, I can tell you,” said Stingo.

Fido sighed contentedly and lit up his pipe. “So what was all that ‘Stingo’ nonsense about, then?”

“Because you would just have used me, and cast me aside like a worthless mathom when you had had your way with me, like so many Hobbit lasses before me.”

“Would I, my angel?”

“Yes — all the Shire knows what a notorious rogerer you are.”

“Yes, that’s true. But now I’ve come to really know you and love you, I want to marry you, Stingo!”

“Snowdrop”, said Stingo.

“Yes, Snowdrop... what a cool name for such hot girl. Well, now I want to marry you, Snowdrop!”

“Oh Fido!”

“Oh Snowdrop!”

“Take me again, Fido!”

An hour later, the lovers were about to try it rabbit-fashion when the door was flung open, and Snider strode into the room. When he had locked the door carefully behind him, he confronted the two naked Hobbits.

“Really!” he snorted, as Fido made a grab for Snowdrop’s knickers. “This is too much. Put some clothes on before the others come back!”

“You don’t seem very surprised that Stingo’s a girl,” said Fido, with one leg in his breeches, and the other wrapped around Snowdrop’s slim waist.

“Only a complete knob-head would mistake a body like that for a furry-footed Hobbit,” said Snider with undisguised admiration.

“Thank you,” smiled Snowdrop, slipping into a very revealing pink crop-top and frayed shorts which showed her trim waist and shapely legs off to perfection.

Soon they were dressed and sitting by the fire. “You mentioned the Witch Queen earlier,” began Fido hesitantly. “What do you know about her?”

“Several things,” answered Snider with a leer. “But it’ll cost you”.

“What do you mean?” asked Snowdrop suspiciously.

“Just this; I will tell you what I know about the Witch Queen, and perhaps give you a few hints about repairing tyre punctures — but I shall want a reward.”

“And what might that be?” asked Fido. He had trusted Snider up to now because he’d had to, but now he suspected he’d fallen in with a dirty old perve.

What was it Butterbore had said? ‘e’s one o’ them wanderin’ peddlers — numenorian rug trafficker, more like, by the number of strange packages that arrive for ‘im.’ He shifted uncomfortably and moved his hand closer to his sword. “If he tries to get into Snowdrop’s pants, *I’ll kill him*,” he said to himself.

“You must take me with you.”

“Oh!” said Fido, much relieved. “I thought —”

“I know what you thought, you randy little Rabbit. But you’ll meet worse things on the road than an old rug-peddler who hasn’t had a shag in six months.”

Snowdrop blushed. “Gosh... if it’s really been *THAT* long, I could — I would — I mean, I might —”

“I’ll kill any man who lays a finger on you!” growled Fido.

“Pity...” teased Snowdrop, nibbling on a plate of crispy mushrooms. The mushrooms, that is, not the plate, which was anything but crispy. “It might have been interesting...”

“You don’t seem to be taking your predicament very seriously,” said Snider.

“Mr Fido will protect me.”

“Don’t be too sure.”

“What do you know?” asked Snowdrop.

“Too much,” said Snider, grimly. “I know there are no trains out of Bree on Tuesdays, on account of Tuesday being the Mayor’s birthday. I also know that you can get a very nasty rash from doing what you were doing when I came in. But that’s not important, right now. It’s enough for you to know that the thing that hunts you is altogether evil. It feels no pity; it does not sleep, it has no conscience, you cannot reason with it, you cannot fight it, and it will not ever stop until you are dead, and the ring is in it’s grasp. A really fast motor-car is your only hope.”

The Hobbits stared at him open-mouthed and were shocked to see he was trembling from head to foot. For a while he sat with unseeing eyes as if he were reliving some unspeakable nightmare.

“There!” he sighed, drawing Snowdrop’s hand into his. “You fear it now, my pretty, but you do not fear it enough — yet. Tomorrow you will have to escape, if you can. And my motor-car is your only hope.”

Just then there was a heavy blow on the door, followed by a dull thud, and a lingering groan.

Fido dropped the mushroom that was halfway to his mouth. Snowdrop dropped the plate. Snider dropped his pipe. Snowdrop squealed as the hot ash dropped onto her thigh.

“Stay there!” hissed Snider, and crept across the darkened room, his naked sword gleaming in the flickering firelight. He turned the key and wrenched open the door.

“Mith-mithter Fido, Surr — *argghh...*” Jam Spongee staggered into the room and fell in a heap at Fido’s feet.

“Jam!” said Fido. “You’re drunker than a coney!”

“And you stink horribly!” said Snowdrop.

“Wh — whasat? Whassat g-girl doing here?”

“It’s me — Stingo.”

“Schting — Schtinggo?”

“Don’t you recognise me without my disguise?”

Jam gaped up at her and heaved.

Snowdrop stepped nimbly back as he vomited heavily on to the carpet. No

sooner had they had cleaned him up and put him to bed when there was a loud rap on the door. It was Mr Butterbore.

“I’ve come to apologise for mislayin’ that note Mr Randolf left for you Mr Fag — Mr Underpants. ‘ere it is!”

Snider drew him into the room and re-locked the door behind him.

“Well?” said Fido, “read it, then!”

“Just a minute,” said Butterbore, catching sight of Snowdrop. “Who’s this? I have strict rules about female visitors in guest’s rooms arter eight-o-clock —”

“It’s Stingo, you idiot!” snapped Snider.

“Stingo?” said Butterbore, scratching his head. “But Stingo’s a bloke — this ‘e is a she.. How did ‘e, how did she —”

“By a clever disguise. In much the same way as you have managed to cleverly disguise the vacuum between your ears, Mr Butterbore,” said Snider. “Now will you read the note?”

Butterbore mopped his brow and cleared his throat. “Dear Burleyman”, he began solemnly. ‘Please change the towels when you bring my aromatherapy candles. May I also remind you that I must have scented soap for my bath, not the foul-smelling cowpats Marge left yesterday —”

“— Could we skip the Wizard’s toiletries?” interrupted Fido.

“Sorry, Guv. ‘Faggins will be going by the name of Underpants’ — mind that, Butterbore — Underpants. NOT Funderpants, Thunderpants, or Fag Funderpants. ‘e will be accompanied by three ‘obbits. An over-protective, fat little servant with no more sense than a lobotomised rabbit —”

Snowdrop burst into giggles.

“— a lispng, dim-witted ninny in yellow strides..”

Fido slapped Snowdrop on the back and broke into howls of laughter.

“And a very ‘andsome lithe-limbed lad wearing tight leather pants who is not what ‘e seems”.

“Well that was true enough,” spluttered Fido.

“You haven’t ‘eard the wizard’s description of yourself, yet, guv,” said Butterbore.

“Let’s have it, then.”

“A cheeky little chappie in a green weskit with airs and graces above his station who is a few links short of a bicycle chain.”

“Humph!” snorted Fido. “Is that all he said?”

“No,” said Butterbore. “there’s more: ‘They may meet a stranger at the inn. A tall, dark, unsavoury looking character, who goes by the name of Snider. He masquerades as a numenorian rug trafficker’ — there I told you so!”

“Get on with it!” interrupted Snider.

“— but is really the famous Orc-slayer and impossibly pedantic consulting detective, Harry Gaunt.”

“Wow!” said Snowdrop. “To think I turned down the chance of a shag with *THE* Harry Gaunt! I’ve read every one of your cases. I nearly died when that gorgeous Elven warrior babe was almost gang-banged by those three Orcs — wait a moment — if you’re *really* Harry Gaunt, you’ll have a heart-shaped mole on the inside of your left — WOW!” exclaimed Snowdrop.

“Have a fried mushroom, Mr Butterbore,” said Fido politely. “They’re delicious.”

Butterbore coughed and edged towards the door. “No thanks, if it’s all the

same to you, Mr, er — Underpants. If I don't find your Mr Pantypluck soon, 'e'll be locked out for the night."

Snider unlocked the door and the innkeeper hurried quickly away.

"Perry!" said Fido, "I'd forgotten all about him. Where can that dratted Hobbit have got to at this time of night in a town with as few attractions as Bree?"

"Perhaps he came back early and went upstairs with that painted floosie."

"Don't be silly, Snowdrop. Perry wouldn't know what to do with one."

There was a long silence. "Well?" said Snider, eventually. "Now you know who I am will you let me give you a lift in my motor-car?"

"Is it *really* fast?" asked Snowdrop.

"Yep".

"Does it have leather seats?"

"Yep."

"And an eight-speaker sound system loud enough to blow out an Orc's eardrums at fifty yards?"

"Yep."

"You bet!" said Snowdrop, breathlessly.

At that moment the door splintered into fragments, there was a terrifying rush of hot wind, the lights went out, and something stood in the shattered doorway. It was like a great shadow with enormous, black wings, in the middle of which were two enormous breasts. Of woman-shape maybe, but bigger than melons. A foul smell went before it and followed after it, and traveled across the room and up the Hobbit's protesting noses.

The creature advanced toward them. In its cold white face burned two cruel and merciless eyes. Its rouged nipples quivered with suppressed desire; its hair was long, and dark, and quite pretty in a slutty sort of way; its full, crimson lips parted in a lascivious smile to reveal the largest and sharpest canine teeth Fido had ever seen.

"Which one iss Fagginsss?" it hissed. "We will suck off his ring!"

Fido and Snowdrop clutched each other in terror.

"Don't look at its eyes!" warned Snider.

But it was too late. Snowdrop was already stumbling toward the Horror. In another moment it was upon her and had ripped the skimpy crop-top from her shoulders; It's merciless, red eyes were a window into nothingness; a shallow world of mindless shopping, teenage diaries and cheap scent, which overwhelmed her simple Hobbit mind with madness. Fido was rooted to the spot in mounting terror. Snowdrop was overcome with mounting excitement. She slid to the ground and stretched out her arms to embrace the Horror.

It stooped over her in triumph, flapped it's hideous bat-like wings, and prepared to fasten it's vile lips upon her snow white breast.

"Nooo!" shouted Fido.

"Oh yesss," moaned Snowdrop.

Then Snider leapt forward with his sword in his hands, and slashed at its wing. The creature let out a hideous scream of rage and flung Snowdrop aside to grapple with him.

"Quick! The mushrooms!" he shouted.

"Mushrooms?" repeated Fido, incredulously.

"Yes, mushrooms! Of all Witch-Banes, the most deadly. It's the only thing

that'll stop it."

Fido rushed for the griddle, and snatching up the frying pan, hurled the contents at the creature.

There was a flash, and a noise like thunder as the roof came crashing down, and he knew no more.

When Fido awoke, Snowdrop was cradling his head in her arms. Snider crouched beside her with his sword in his hand. The room was in ruins. "What has happened? Where is the creature that attacked us?" he asked.

"You are safe in my arms, dearest Fido-kins," said Snowdrop smoothing his brow. "You hit your head on the frying pan when you fell. That horrid, smelly woman with the big boobies is gone."

"Woman?" asked Fido, sitting up.

"She was a woman once," said Snider. "A Queen among queens, but she played with fire once too often, and so succumbed to that debilitating vice which wrecks the strongest of constitutions and leads to greasy skin and short-term memory loss. Now where was I?"

"Describing the Witch-Queen," said Fido.

"What happened then?" asked Snowdrop, fascinated in spite of her fear.

"Oh, the usual stuff. She started dating Orcs, fell in with a very fast set of Numenorians who did a bit of blood-sucking at weekends, started writing really bad poetry, and was eventually head-hunted by the Great Pimp which rules the Rings. It was he who gave her her wings, and made her the immortal fashion-victim she has become."

"How dreadful," said Snowdrop with a shudder. "What ever would have happened to Fido if she had got him?"

"After her Ring Rakes had gang-banged you both and put you on the game, you mean?"

Snowdrop blanched. "Yess..."

"After she'd covered Fido in melted chocolate, brought him to the peak of ecstasy, and bitten his Hobbithood off in a fit of pique, you mean?"

"Yes," gulped Snowdrop.

"After she'd rogered Fido senseless with his own bicycle pump, you mean?"

"Er — yes."

"After she'd made Fido read your uncle Bingo's history of Mathoms aloud to you, you mean?"

"Yesss..."

"You would have become like her, only not half as pretty. In short, my dear Hobbitess, you would have become a very minor pimp under the dominion of the Great Pimp; and he would have read you his poetry for an eternity for trying to keep his ring."

"Thank goodness we had mushrooms for tea, then!" said Snowdrop.

They had just settled in to Snider's penthouse suite on the 8th floor, and were having a quiet cocktail, when Perry Pantypluck burst in and collapsed in Snowdrop's arms.

"Wing Wakes!" he cried, "I have seen them!"

"Wing wakes?" repeated Snowdrop, pushing him gently away.

"He means 'RING RAKES,'" explained Snider. "But that's not important right now."

“Why’s Stingo wearwing lipstick and dwessed like a girl?”

“Never mind that now,” said Fido, “what happened next?”

“Who’s that man by the bar?” asked Perry.

“Never mind that now. You can trust him. What happened next,” repeated Fido.

“Where did Stingo get those bweasts from?”

“I’ll tell you later.”

“Why have you got your hand on his bottom?”

“I’ll tell you in the morning — now will you *PLEASE* get on with your story!”

“Where’s Jam — did the Wakes get him?”

“No, he’s drunk.

“Where? I can’t see him?”

“Here — look, he’s sleeping on Snider’s bed.”

“Oh... Who’s Snider?”

“Will you *PLEASE* tell us your story,” repeated Fido sharply.

“Ohh.. So why’s Stingo dwessed like a girl and wearwing comical bweasts?”

“*WILL YOU TELL US WHAT HAPPENED NEXT!*” shouted Fido.

“OK...” began Perry hesitantly. “After I’d had my walk I came back to find you, and was just standing by the door admirwing the cwaftsmanship of those carved donkeys, when I felt something wearily howwible cweping near. It was wery dark, but I could just make out this shadowy figure beckoning me... I caught a glimpse of naked legs and something pink in the lamplight and then —”

“— It’s that dratted trollop from the bar!” interrupted Fido.

“Twollop?”

“Never mind — carry on with your storwy — I mean, ‘story.’”

“Well — I followed it up the woad —”

“Up the what?” said Snowdrop

“He means ‘Road,’” explained Snider.

“Followed what?” asked Snowdrop.

“Whatever it was I saw.”

“The hooker from the bar?” suggested Snowdrop

“Hooker? What’s a ‘hooker’?” asked Perry.

“A girl who sells herself for money,” explained Snowdrop

“I don’t think it was a girl”, said Perry.

“How can you be so sure?” asked Snowdrop.

“I think I know what a girl looks like, Stingo!”

“Do you really?” said Snowdrop. “Then what am I?”

“I’m not stupid, you know. Wearwing a fwock and pink lipstick doesn’t make you a girl, Stingo. Girls don’t have bweasts like —”

“— You silly Hobbit!” interrupted Fido. “Do shut up about Snowdrop or we’ll never get to the end of this tale!”

“Snowdwop? who’s Snowdwop?”

“I meant Stingo!”

“Well,” said Perry, giving Fido a queer look. “It cwossed the woad into a garden, and I followed it.”

“You may have a mushroom for a brain, Master Pantypluck,” grunted Snider, “But you’ve got balls in your pants.”

“I don’t know about that... I nearly peed myself when whatever it was came

up behind me, and.. and, howwible, wough fingers started gwoping me in places no fingers had ever gwoped me before. I bit them off and passed out. When I came to I wan all the way down the main woad until I got back here. I don't know what came over me."

"I do," said Snider, grimly. "The Hot Breath of the Ring Rakes. It almost got Snowdrop. You both escaped a rogering by the the skin of your teeth — in your case, quite literally."

"Will they weturn?" asked Perry.

"Not tonight, said Snider. "They are not all here yet."

"ALL?" asked Perry in a shaky voice.

"Rakes", said Snider. "The Nine winged, Ring Rakes. The Witch-Queen is their leader, but she never does a job alone. I cannot think why she risked attacking us tonight, unless it was because she thought we would be a pushover after her attack on Perry. Now you should get some rest. We'll have to make an early start if we're to get away without being spotted tomorrow."

Snider barred the door and stood guard over the Hobbits while they slept.

Snowdrop dreamed contentedly in Fido's arms. Perry tossed and turned on the couch and wondered why Stingo was sleeping with Fido. "Jam will kill him when he finds out," he muttered to himself. Slowly, he drifted into a nightmare in which Fido was being held down by two hideous Rakes while Stingo pushed an enormous turnip up his bottom. Jam was too drunk to dream of anything, and snored the night away in complete oblivion.

"Well, your party is a caution, and no mistake, said Butterbore at breakfast, the following morning. "We 'aven't 'ad such doings in Bree since the Orcs came out of the norf and rogered the mayor senseless in 'is bed with his own staff o' office. First, a strumpet I've never let eyes on, propositions me guests under me own roof wivout so much as a by your leave, then Mr Underpants and young Stingo vanish before our very eyes. Your Mr Pantypluck gets 'isself kidnapped by a sex-crazed Ring Rake, Mr Snider trashes my best Hobbit burrow, Stingo turns out to be a very attractive young lady wiv the 'ots for your leader, and some evil Witch-Queen slays ten guests in a bloodbath! Finally, Mr Jam Spongee nearly caused a fight when he vomited into that dwarf's magnificent beard. Who is going to pay for it all? Eh? You tell me that, Mr Thunderpants!"

"Underpants," corrected, Fido, trying hard not to laugh.

"Oh, you think it's funny, do you?"

"Not all of it, no. But you must admit the vomiting was quite droll.

"Droll, was it? Then you'll die laughing when I tell you that the Ring Rakes reduced Mr Snider's nice motor-car to scrap metal."

Snowdrop took her hand off Snider's thigh as he choked on his mushrooms.

"I'm afraid so, Mr Snider," continued Butterbore sadly. "I'd offer you my donkey-trap, but that's vanished, along with all your bicycles."

Fido was crushed by the news. How would they reach Ravendale on foot pursued by winged enemies? It would be easier to cycle underwater.

"Drat it all, Mr Fido, Sir," said Jam. "I said as we should have taken the train."

"If only you could," said Butterbore, wringing his hands. "But there aint no trains out o' Bree on Tuesdays. Leastways, none that go to Ravendale, on account of Tuesday being the Mayor's birthday. But as you're from the Shire, you

wouldn't know that."

Snider picked at his mushrooms in silence for a while, looking at Snowdrop's tight leather cycling pants, as if he were weighing up whether to roger her where she sat or take her roughly from behind when they were alone on the road.

"Trains will not help us to escape winged Rakes," he said at last. "And bicycles will be unsuitable for the rough, mountain roads I intend to take. But it is the mushrooms that trouble me most."

"I'm sorry to 'ere that, Mr Snider," said Butterbore, wrinkling his nose. "I'll smother Marge in her own butter if she's undercooked 'em again!"

"No," said Snider, "I meant the mushrooms we need to carry to defend us against the Witch-Queen and her Rakes."

"I can carry enough for two!" said Jam, stoutly.

"Can nothing be done, Mr Butterbore," asked Fido.

"About the mushrooms, you mean?"

"No, our transportation."

"I doubt it," said the innkeeper. "The few bicycles that we 'ad in Bree were all in my shed, and they're gone, seemingly, along wiv the dwarfs' ponies and Marge's roller skates. But I'll do what I can and send Marge out as soon as she's finished washing-up your breakfast things."

"You had better do that," said Snider. "We shall need something to carry the mushrooms in."

The Hobbits had just finished packing when Marge came back to report that no bicycle or pony was to be got for any amount of money in the neighbourhood - except a handcart: "Phil Barmy 'as one but 'e won't part wiv it for less than the price o' ten pound of best pipeweed," she announced disconsolately.

"Phil Barmy?" isn't that the ruffian we met at the West-Gate?" asked Fido.

"The very same," replied Snider. "The cart is probably only good for firewood. But it's all we're going to get."

Eventually they knocked Phil Barmy's price down to six pounds of pipeweed, or rather, Jam knocked Phil Barmy about until he accepted their offer.

And so they said farewell to Butterbore and set off, anxious and dispirited, under the shifty eyes of the surly villagers. Fido took the lead, followed by Jam pulling a handcart piled high with their luggage, Snowdrop's frocks, and several rush baskets overflowing with evil-smelling mushrooms. Perry and Snowdrop trotted behind him, while Snider brought up the rear.

"I'm glad to see you've stopped pwetending to be a girl, Stingo," said Perry, and added in an undertone: "Jam will kill you if you twy taking libwerties with Mr Fwido, you know."

"You idiot!" said Snowdrop, "I *AM* a girl and what's more, I'm going to *MARRY* Mr Fido, just as soon as we get to Ravendale."

Perry stopped in his tracks and stared open-mouthed at Snowdrop. "Mawwy Mr Fido?" he gasped. "B-but Mr Fido's engaged to his uncle Bingo's niece, Snowdwop Smallbottom, Stingo!"

"OH, DO SHUT UP, PERRY!" shouted the rest of the Hobbits in unison, and trudged on.

Behind an unkempt hedge, a dark shadow flapped its wings and massaged its crotch expectantly. "Not before I've rogered them all beyond senselessness," it cackled evilly.



*The End*

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