



In the COMPANY *of*
ANGELS

"DAVID FARLAND ONCE AGAIN PROVES
HIMSELF TO BE A WIZARD
AT STORYTELLING."

PUBLISHERS WEEKLY



DAVID
FARLAND

In the COMPANY *of*
ANGELS

DAVID
FARLAND

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Summary: Eliza Gadd crosses the Great Plains by handcart with her Mormon husband on the journey from their native England to a new home in the Rocky Mountains. Baline Mortensen, a nine-year old Dane, is a member of the handcart company as well. Together they suffer unimaginable deprivations. Based on the true story of the Mormon pioneers in the Willie Handcart Company of 1856, who leave for the Rocky Mountains too late in the season and are stranded on the plains in the early onset of the coldest winter in US history.

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THE END OF THE WORLD

“Doff your cap, Mormon, and show us some horns!” a man cried.

Eliza Gadd's stomach twisted into a knot. The stranger was glaring at Eliza's husband, Samuel, who tried his best to ignore the man.

The stranger stood on the pathway to his house on the outskirts of Council Bluffs, Iowa, wearing nothing but some threadbare overalls and a battered black hat, his legs shaking from fear, his face reddened and twisted with rage. He gripped an ax, as if ready to take a swing at the first Mormon that drew too close. He rushed to the front gate of his white picket fence, one hand hovering near the latch, and demanded again, “Doff your cap, Mormon!”

A few feet ahead of Eliza, her husband Samuel pulled a handcart along the road, his blue denim shirt soaked with a V of sweat down his back, his floppy broad-rimmed felt hat hiding his sandy hair. The handcart squeaked and rattled as if it would split apart at any moment. It was a little larger than a wheelbarrow, and it held all of the family's possessions—clothes for Eliza, her husband, and seven of their eight children, along with a frying pan, a pot to boil water, and a few spoons and cooking implements.

Samuel nodded, but kept walking. The ax-man leaned over the gate and screamed, “Look at me when I talk to you!”

He was an unsavory fellow. His sunburned arms were knotted with muscle, and sweat seemed to have permanently left a greasy stain in the armpits of his overalls. “Show your horns! Show ’em to me, you Mormon devil!”

The farmer trembled with anticipation and terror, as if both eager to see a Mormon's horns and terrified by the prospect.

Horns? Eliza wondered. *He can't seriously believe that Mormons have horns.* In a saner world, she would have hoped that he was jesting, but she spied his two daughters in an upper bedroom, peering out the window with eyes made as round as hens' eggs by fright. These buffoons really did believe that Mormons had horns.

Similar scenes had greeted them in town after town. The locals would gather at their doors to gawk and to jeer at the poor deluded Mormons who were hoofing it off into the wilderness to starve.

Eliza and Samuel were traveling with five hundred Mormons in the Willie Handcart Company, trying to reach Utah—the promised land of the Mormons, the American Zion.

Before they could reach Zion, they had to pass through Council Bluffs, a few hundred rough log-and-mud houses sheltered in a small valley between two rows of hills; the town boasted nearly a dozen taverns and little else. Rail fences partitioned off the gardens behind the houses, where corn grew tall in mid-August. Chickens, black and red, raced about the street, while a few hogs wallowed at the roadside.

In all of human history, no group had ever traveled so far to escape persecution. The Jews had fled Egypt and traveled only a few dozen miles, while the gypsies had spread several hundred miles across Europe. But most of the folks in this company had left their homes in England, Scotland, Denmark, or France and sailed thousands of miles across the ocean—only to march across a continent. One member of the party, Sister Tate, was a Hindu, all the way from India.

The immigrants in the handcart company dressed shabbily. Most of the children and even many adults could not afford shoes, and so they walked barefoot. Half the women in the band were widows, and so women outnumbered men three to one, and of the folks in the company, a dozen were cripples, senile, or mad, and thus had to be carried in the carts.

Eliza had been born to an upper-class family, but she had landed among the poorest of the Mormon poor.

The signs of poverty among the group went well beyond the immigrants' threadbare attire. Most were stunted from malnutrition, and many suffered from lice, strange rashes, and scabs that would not heal.

So the poor were walking to Utah, unable to afford the wagons that a wealthier man would consider necessary.

In every town that they had passed, the company had been forced to run a gauntlet as the locals came to ogle, mouths agape. The Willie Company had given them a free freak show; secretly Eliza knew that she was the biggest freak of them all.

She held her chin up, tried to show no fear. Her cheeks burned with shame. She had been walking down a hot road all day, and the clouds of dust raised by others had powdered her face. She only hoped that it would hide her embarrassment.

Eliza straightened her little white cap, a stylish thing that her mother had left her.

She strode past the ax-man, smiled genteelly, nodded good-day, and tried to ignore him, even as every nerve in her body warned her not to turn her back. The fellow stood trembling, a crazed look in his eyes, and shouted at Samuel. "Don't you—don't you walk past me, Mormon. Don't turn your back on me. I'm talking to you!"

Eliza was just congratulating herself on making it past the ax-man when her seventeen-year-old daughter, Jane, strode up to the fellow, bouncing baby Daniel on her hip.

Jane smiled, affected a silly American accent, and said, "Sorry to disappoint you, feller, but we filed off our horns just yesterday. Makes it easy to hide among you gentiles!"

Eliza wanted to warn Jane away from the madman, but she was a pretty girl, as lissome as a swan, with hair that shone like spun flax, and Jane seemed to think that her sway over men held no bounds.

The ax-man's eyes bulged and his Adam's apple bobbed as he vainly tried to figure out something intelligent to say. It was common to file off cows' horns, so that they wouldn't gore their owners. Obviously the poor man was trying to figure out if the ploy might work on a Mormon.

Jane laughed and thrust out her tongue at him, wagging it in snake like fashion.

The American stumbled backward, retreating, and tripped over one of his uneven paving stones.

The clown! Eliza thought. *His entire senses have gone derelict!*

She'd faced unreasoning persecutors back in England, yet she'd never seen anyone so frightfully dense as this.

Still, she'd been surprised by the impoverished intellect of Americans all along her trek. After arriving by ship in New York, the saints had been harassed at every stop—assailed by men with foul mouths, threatened, denied shelter at hostels, brutally treated by railroad executives who forced the immigrants to sleep in cattle cars when they'd paid for better.

Illinois had been worst. The immigrants had taken a train up to Lake Superior, and then gone by steamboat to Chicago, and from there rode to Rock Island, where they crept into the town by night and hid in a train house to wait out a thunderstorm. A mob gathered, two hundred men with guns and torches, demanding that the Mormons “send out their women” amid threats of rape and murder. They'd hurled insults and rocks at the train shed for five hours, while the immigrant men huddled behind the doors armed with nothing more than a couple of pistols and sabers.

The immigrants hoped that the local peace officers might come to save them. But Captain Willie informed them that there was no law that would protect a Mormon in Illinois.

Ten years earlier, in 1846, Illinois had placed a bounty on Mormon scalps, offering thousands for the heads of the church's leaders. Even the hair of Eliza's young babes was worth a dollar a scalp.

Illinois was just one of more than a dozen states that had passed such laws against various religions in an effort to drive out Mormons, Jews, and other undesirables.

Over the years, only luck had saved any Mormons from losing scalps in Illinois. The first pair of bounty hunters that had ever tried to bag a Mormon attacked a passing wagon, killing a man, his ten children, and three “wives.” Fourteen people had been butchered. Yet when the authorities researched the case, they discovered that the alleged Mormon was just an innocent Methodist minister, traveling with his large family and two aunts. The scandal over the murders had spurred state officials to withdraw the bounty, though the laws remained on the books.

At eleven that night a sheriff had finally come with enough deputies to disperse the fatigued mob, though a summer storm deserved most of the credit for scattering the killers.

Eliza had learned to be wary of the mobs that formed in nearly every city they visited. Sometimes even the lawmen joined in. A week earlier, a sheriff from Poweshiek County, Iowa, had come with a small army and forced the handcart company to unload all of its supply wagons on the pretense of searching for women tied up under the floorboards. The charge was insane.

Yet rumors spread by the eastern press persisted in telling of Mormons abducting women and hiding them in compartments in wagons—or carrying them through secret tunnels under the Rocky Mountains—all in an effort to get them to Utah, where the women were used to sate the monstrous appetites of Brigham Young, the Mormon leader.

Eliza thought that you'd have to be as dumb as a fencepost to believe such tales.

But there it was.

The whole United States was in turmoil, everywhere Eliza looked. It wasn't just the attacks on Mormons. There was a war breaking out in Kansas between the slavers and the abolitionists. In May, Old John Brown had gotten up a gang of men and gone through the countryside in Kansas stabbing to death every slaver he could roust out of bed while the slavers continued murdering abolitionists in a bloodbath. The federal government had called in troops from all over the frontier and begun blowing houses down with cannons. Now they'd arrested the governor and were threatening to hang him for treason—all for failing to stop the violence.

It seemed to Eliza that the federal government was to blame.

It was an election year, and the newly formed Republican Party was calling for an end to the “twin relics of barbarism”—slavery and polygamy. Mormons were opposed to slavery, but while polygamy was widely practiced on the American frontier—mostly by fur trappers and settlers who had taken multiple Indian squaws as wives—the Mormons were the only American religion that openly condoned polygamy. Joseph Smith, the church's first prophet, had proclaimed that polygamy was sanctified by God if it was practiced, as by Abraham, with the goal of raising children in righteousness. So a select few members of the church were asked to enter into plural marriages.

President Buchanan, a Democrat, was responding to the Republican threat by promising to “get tough” on the Mormons. By making a sufficient example of them, he planned to cow the southern states into giving up the practice of slavery, and thus avoid a civil war. Whether that meant that Buchanan would send an army across the plains with orders to exterminate the Mormons, as had been done in Missouri a dozen years earlier, or if he had something else up his sleeve, no one could yet guess.

It wasn't a good time to be a Mormon.

So Eliza had learned to fear these “Yankee yahoos” as Brother Savage liked to call them.

Eliza sighed wearily as she lifted her sleeping babe, Isaac, higher on her shoulder. She waved away a trio of mosquitoes bent on carrying the child off to eat.

Her calves and back ached from walking the past three hundred miles, and this had been the easy part of the journey. There had been good roads and an occasional town, where one might buy what one needed. Ahead of them was nothing but wilderness. Eliza licked her sunburned lips, sucked in her hungry belly, and lifted her chin.

Ahead were more houses, and the gawkers were streaming out to greet them. She wanted to make sure that her children stayed near, that they presented themselves well.

Jane looked fine. Sarah, age five, was riding in the back of the handcart and had fallen fast asleep, her head lying on a bundle of clothes. Mary Ann, age seven, was old enough to walk much of the way, but her father was letting her ride, too.

Thirteen-year-old Bill plodded behind the cart, ready to push it if need be. Her oldest son, Albert, was working the cattle drive, so Bill had taken over many of Albert's former duties.

She half-turned to see little Sam Junior, age ten, who walked well behind the cart, talking softly to one of the Danish emigrant girls that he played with, a bright-faced little blonde girl with a blue dress and golden hair. Her name was Baline.

“That there is a dragonfly,” Sam Junior told Baline. “Can you say dragonfly?” He gestured to a streak of red that buzzed nearby. The dragonfly hovered near Baline's white apron, seeking a place to land.

“Ya, I say it, ya,” Baline answered merrily. “Is like two vords, dragon and fly, dragonfly. Ya?”

“Precisely,” Sam said, sounding for all the world like some school proctor.

“Sam, catch up—and watch your posture,” Eliza called. “We're coming through town. Remember your station.”

Sam glanced at her and suddenly began marching with his back ramrod straight as he hurried to catch up. She didn't have to say more.

Eliza frowned at Baline. She was a bright child, a magnet for other children, and that was what worried Eliza. Though she was only ten, Sam Junior might find himself attracted to such a girl, and Eliza didn't believe in interracial marriage. Most Mormons saw all people as brothers and sisters and treated the Danes and even the French as equals. However, it was bad enough when an Englishman married a lowly Irish woman or a Scot, but Eliza wouldn't have her son chasing after a brutish, ill-mannered Dane.

At the front of the column of weary travelers, Captain Willie, a bearish man of forty, called out, “Let's give them a song!” Obviously he hoped to drown out the voices of his detractors.

The Mormons, as obedient as sheep, began to sing the anthem of Mormon pilgrims:

*“Come, come, ye saints, no toil nor labor fear,
But with joy, wend your way.
Though hard to you, this journey may appear,
Grace shall be, as your day.
'Tis better far for us to strive,
Our useless cares from us to drive,
Do this, and joy, your hearts will swell—
All is well. All is well.”*

Eliza refused to sing. She wouldn't even mouth the words. Still the music began to ascend around her as the immigrants plodded into town, handcarts creaking and rattling. Their practiced voices rose in harmony, echoing from the small hills along the road, frightening chickens, drowning

out the voices of the locals, many of whom ran from their houses and stood at their gates to jeer.

“Say ‘hi’ to the injuns for me,” one man cried from a rocking chair on his porch as Eliza passed his white house. He took off his hat and revealed a massive scar on the crown of his head, circled by scraggly hair.

“Mother,” ten-year-old Samuel cried at her back, “that man has been scalped!”

The fellow laughed derisively. His antics had had their desired effect.

“Don't let him alarm you,” Eliza warned. “It will only encourage him.”

Two doors down, a portly matron in a faded cotton dress accosted Eliza. “Don't go,” she shouted, reaching out as if to stop her, or perhaps grab baby Isaac from her arms. “Please don't go. It's too late in the year to cross the mountains!”

Eliza smiled and nodded at the woman kindly; she whispered, “Thank you,” but kept walking.

The matron shouted desperately, “At least leave the babe with me! If you love it, you'll leave it behind.”

If we were back in England, Eliza told herself, I should want to be her friend.

Eliza wasn't the kind of woman that could leave her child behind. She walked on. For three houses, people just stared sullenly as the Mormons passed.

Now came the mockery. “Gee-haw,” some teenage boys shouted as they perched on a fence, taunting the men and women who pulled the carts. “Get up, mule!”

Eliza kept her eyes forward, ignoring the taunts, even when a green apple flew through the air and rebounded off of Samuel's back.

The rules of the handcart train were strict. The saints were to ignore any abuse, to say nothing in retaliation, and to follow the Savior's example and turn the other cheek. To revile one's tormentors in any way or to seek to rebuke them tended to only invite further attacks.

So the immigrants trundled down the street, voices rising in song just enough to drown out the worst of the insults, until they entered the merchant district.

Eliza's feet hurt. She'd only carried her babe five miles this morning, but her feet were swollen and calloused from weeks of abuse.

She passed a barbershop and an apothecary, a dry goods store, and a pair of blacksmiths with the bitter scent of coal smoke coming from their open doors. But there were also the taverns where scantily clad prostitutes leaned from the upper windows, their breasts nearly falling out of their flimsy attire, as they shouted down to Jane, "Hey, you—you're a likely one. Show us a bit of leg."

Suddenly the handcart at the front of the column came to a grinding halt, blocking the road so that all one hundred carts behind had to stop, too.

Captain Willie stood at the head of the column talking with a strange, heavysset man in a cheap brown suit.

"Who do you think that is?" Eliza ventured to ask her husband.

"Church agent, I imagine," Samuel answered, removing his cap and wiping the sweat from his face with the worn sleeve of his shirt. "There's a church outfitting station across the river where we're supposed to acquire more supplies."

The church agent, a young broad-shouldered man with a thick beard the color of chestnuts, gestured toward the banks of the river. His voice suddenly grew loud and carried as he told Captain Willie, "Give 'em a couple of hours to rest and to shop, then we'll ferry across."

Captain Willie nodded in acknowledgment. Docked just downhill at the side of the river was a huge ferry, a brand new steamboat, gleaming in the midday sun.

Eliza relished the idea of shopping. She didn't have much money, only twenty-eight cents left to her name, mostly big American pennies. Rations had been scant on their journey, so she hoped to buy a little candy for the children, and perhaps some buttons or extra needles.

The volume of the Mormons' voices rose as they came to the climax of their song:

*"And should we die before the journey's through,
Happy day, all is well!
We then are free, from toil and sorrow too,
With the just, we shall dwell.*

*But if our lives are spared again
To see the saints their rest obtain,
Oh, how we'll make this chorus swell!
All is well. All is well!"*

Eliza was embarrassed to be here, to be among the ill-bred Mormons, to be so filthy. The trail through Iowa had been filled with tumultuous hills. The tops of the hills found the ground dry, with dust as fine as talcum, while down in the valleys, recent thundershowers had left mud holes and ruts, so that one man could not pull a cart alone. Thus, every one's feet were caked with mud. Her son Bill was as sooty as a chimney sweep, and nothing could be done about it.

"Tuck in your shirt," Eliza whispered to him, "and comb your hands through your hair."

Jane stood with the other twin, Daniel, who was just shy of his second birthday, bouncing the babe on her hip.

In the profound silence that followed, a rough-looking fellow in front of the tavern called, "Gee-haw, mule," at Samuel and grinned like an idiot, as if he were the first to come up with the insult. He'd been leaning against the hitching rail, but now he reached behind his back and pulled out a bullwhip.

A couple of the man's friends stepped forward, too.

Crack! The whip snapped just inches from Samuel's ear. Samuel cringed but made no move to run, nor to defend himself. He stood with legs trembling, quivering, head bent, cowering. Sickness and hard labor had taken thirty pounds from him in the past month, and his poor clothes hung on him like rags.

Samuel would not fight, Eliza knew. He'd been the branch president in their tiny congregation back home, a sort of lay minister. He wouldn't break the rules of the handcart company.

Suddenly a memory exploded into Eliza's consciousness: "Don't marry that man," her father had commanded in a severe tone. "Don't even think about it. 'Ye, gad!' Can you imagine the taunts your children will suffer? 'Look, there goes a Gadd—or is it a gadfly?' "

"Gadd is a good name. It's Welsh. It means 'gate.' "

“Wales,” her father snorted. “You mean you couldn't find a man of low enough breeding in England?”

“He's a good man, Father,” Eliza had said, “not a low sort or a mean man at all. Though he might not be the first in consequence in Wimpole, many hold an elevated opinion of him.”

Eliza's mother had chimed in more sympathetically, “It's not that he's a low man, Eliza. There is no discernable flaw to his character, no overpowering defect in his intellect, but he's a common man, common in every way. He's got a common man's intelligence, a common man's education and lack of ambition. He'll never be a superior provider for you, and heaven help you if you should bear offspring.”

Twenty years ago her parents had spoken that warning, twenty years ago and four months, almost to the day.

It's funny how a few words can come back to haunt you, Eliza thought. Her father had been dead for three years, her mother for five. Yet their warnings rang in her ears, almost as if their ghosts were at her back, whispering.

Her parents had been right. Samuel was not the first-rate provider her parents had aspired to. He'd made a marginal living as a middle-man, renting fields from lords and then advancing the land out again to tenant farmers. Though he was not poor, he'd never brought home enough to keep the family comfortable, and once Samuel had united himself with the Mormon church, many a lord had refused to do business, hoping to starve him into submission; thus Samuel's income had shriveled away until Eliza had been forced to take a position as a nurse just to keep food on the table. Now the whole family was destitute, beyond the verge of ruin, and Samuel had brought them six thousand miles to escape their persecutors.

Still, Eliza thought, *I'm fully prepared to follow him off the edge of the world.*

So Eliza's parents had been right about Samuel. He had no great intellect for extracting an advantage in a business deal. She had argued, “Samuel is not a common man. There's uncommon goodness in him.” Eliza had been right, too. Samuel was unflinchingly faithful to his lofty standards, firm in his decorum. He would not engage in an altercation now, not even to save his own life.

“Oh, he don't like that whip,” one bully chortled. “He don't like the whip one bit. He's an angry old mule, ain't he?” The bully turned from his companions and taunted Samuel. “You got something to say to me, mule?”

One companion pointed at Jane and sniggered, “Forget him— now she's more like it! Hell, I'd be glad to put my spurs to her. What do you say, boys?”

Eliza's jaw clenched at the insult. She looked at her husband. Samuel was a brave man in his way. Though his shoulders were tense and angry, he just stood like a dumb ox and would not answer the men.

Nor would any of the other Mormons come to their rescue, Eliza knew.

One man jested, “She looks plenty skittish to me. Might just buck you off.”

Eliza handed baby Isaac off to her thirteen-year-old son, Bill, and strode toward the brute that had last insulted Jane, but the bully with the whip stepped into Eliza's path, intercepting her. He was thin, perhaps thirty, with dark-brown hair, a hatchet face, and a bushy mustache that dripped down well below his chin. His hat was slung low over his eyes.

“Sir, you and your friends owe my daughter an apology,” Eliza demanded, though she instantly regretted bestowing upon him the honorary “sir.” He was obviously a lout.

The bully smirked, dark eyes flashing. He was chewing slowly, and now he spat a wad of dark tobacco. He made it look as if he was aiming at the ground, even as he soiled Eliza's skirt.

She glared at him and then explained as calmly as possible, “Mister, these immigrants are Mormons. They adhere to strict rules that prohibit violence, and so, as I'm sure that you suspect, you have nothing to fear from them.”

The bully smiled. “Hell, I know that. I was Mormon once't, for about a week—until old Brigham started preaching polygamy.”

“Then you should understand this:” Eliza said, “though my husband and children are Mormons, I am not. I don't partake of their perplexing notions any more than you. As a ‘gentile,’ I'm free to give you the rebuttal that you deserve.” With that, Eliza slapped the bully's face so hard that spittle flew from his mouth. She hoped that she'd knocked out a couple of teeth.

There, she'd finally admitted it in public. Here she was among five hundred Mormons heading to Zion and she didn't give a hoot about their uninformed beliefs.

More the fool me, she thought.

The bully fell back. Rage flashed across his face, and she thought that he'd repay her blow. He grinned broadly. "Well, ma'am, if'n you ain't a Mormon, then maybe there's hope for you yet." He took off his hat, revealing a full head of hair slick with grease. He put the hat over his heart and said, "I apologize to you and your kin. I'm mighty sorry."

Eliza nodded.

"Zeb Walker, you leave that woman alone!" a fellow shouted. It was the church agent that had been giving orders to Captain Willie. He came rushing down the street in his cheap suit.

Zeb whirled to meet him. "Or what, McGaw—" Zeb demanded, "you gonna sissy-slap me, too?"

"Shut your mouth, you damned apostate," McGaw growled.

Zeb Walker turned toward Eliza, and she saw a fiery light in his dark eyes. He was enjoying this.

"I don't take orders from you," Zeb yelled, "ya evil old slave driver. You're fixing to lead these folks straight down the throat of hell, and you act like you're better than me?"

Suddenly, Eliza realized that this is exactly what Zeb had wanted—an audience. He'd staged his insult, cracked his whip, in order to command the immigrants' attention. It was an old street-preacher's trick. You do anything to get a crowd to stop and give ear.

My, she thought, *we are giving them a freak show today*.

Now Zeb stepped up onto the sidewalk to gain a little elevation; he waved his hands broadly and shouted to the folks in the handcart company, "Has McGaw warned you good folks about the Grasshopper War?" Zeb shouted. "They got Mormon crickets back in Utah as big as your thumb and as black as sin. Millions of 'em come swarming over the hills eight weeks ago, turning the land black, eating everything in sight—gardens, trees, your Sunday go-to-meetin' clothes. Folks are starving in Utah! Their children are starving. Has he told you that?"

“You shut your mouth!” McGaw cried. His knuckles had turned white he was clenching his fists so hard. “They know what they're getting into!”

“Oh, do they?” Zeb shouted. “Summer's nearly gone. Up on the Great Divide, winter starts in September, two weeks from now. And you've got a whole passel of cripples and old folks in your crew. Not one in three of yer kids even got shoes.” He turned to the crowd, staring straight at Bill and Sam Junior. “Do you kids know what you're gettin' into? You'll never make it over the Rocky Mountains without freezing! Don't go. Don't listen to your leaders, I'm begging you!” Zeb choked up. His concern for the children was real. “There's work here in town for any man who leaves this company. I promise. I've got a mill, and I'm paying two dollars a day for an honest day's work. I need haulers and drovers. Stay here in town. For heaven's sake, I'm begging.”

“I'm warning you for the last time!” McGaw raged. He moved in closer, as if to strike.

Interesting, Eliza thought. None of the Mormons would stand up to defend the honor of her daughter, but McGaw looked as if he'd tear this apostate's head off in order to shut him up. It made her wonder what McGaw and the other church leaders might be hiding.

“Has he warned you folks about the wildfires?” Zeb called to the crowd. “The Sioux set the prairies on fire each fall to stampede the buffalo onto their killing grounds. You're set to walk straight into the wildfires.”

McGaw growled like an animal and stepped up to Zeb, glaring face-to-face. “They'll make it across the prairies, by God. They'll make it. The handcart system was instituted by a prophet. They'll travel faster than ox-drawn wagons. They won't be hunting stray animals every morning and won't be tied to trails where the grass is deep and the going rough. You'll see!”

The apostate flashed a superior grin at McGaw and goaded him. “Brigham Young ain't no prophet. He's a lying womanizer. The doctrine of spiritual wifery comes from the devil, and Brigham will lead you all straight to hell.”

Eliza wasn't prepared for the sudden attack.

An old white-bearded geezer stood on the tavern porch, leaning on a cane. McGaw snatched the fellow's cane in one fluid move and swung,

hitting Zeb on the shoulder and driving him back, then stabbed low, catching Zeb's ankle in the crook of the cane, and pulled Zeb's foot out from under him.

Zeb fell with a crash, but one of Zeb's cohorts leapt on McGaw from behind, knocking his hat off and grabbing him by the hair, and held McGaw's head fast while he shouted to the others, "Hit him! Hit him!"

McGaw grappled with his attacker, squirming and shouting, "I'm tired of your foul mouths, you apostates!" For a moment it was hard to see who was holding whom.

Samuel grabbed Eliza and pulled her away from the fight. She heard pistols cocking and turned to see that a couple of handcart pioneers had drawn weapons, while others reached for axes, knives, or anything else handy. Several townsfolk did the same, and there was an uneasy moment as both sides took stock of the situation and came to a truce, agreeing to let the men brawl.

One apostate had his arm around McGaw's neck from behind and was trying to choke him while he waited for others to hit him. Yet McGaw was big, and he managed to duck and weave just enough to save himself. Blows glanced harmlessly off of his cheek or missed altogether.

"Samuel," Eliza urged, "it's not a fair fight, three on one."

Sam grunted, "It's fair enough."

At that moment, McGaw ducked, pulling from his attacker's grasp. The man grabbed McGaw's long hair, and part of his scalp came away. As McGaw broke free, his fists began to fly, and blows landed with loud smacks.

Within moments, McGaw landed a punch to Zeb's gut that folded him instantly and left him gasping for air. Another strike sent one of Zeb's allies flying backward over the hitching post. The third apostate was already grasping his shoulder from some hurt, and McGaw grabbed him by one arm and swung him in a circle twice, then sent him flying headfirst into a water trough.

McGaw stood for a moment, glaring at his fallen enemies and huffing like a wounded bull, then reached down and picked up his hat. While he was at it, he grabbed the clump of his own bloody hair and stared at it mutely, as if trying to determine how to reattach it.

“How could you call that exchange fair—” Eliza demanded of her husband. “There were three against one!”

“Three against two—” Samuel corrected. “McGaw had God on his side.”

THE WEAK

With the coming of trouble, Baline Mortensen raced down the line of handcarts to join with the Danes. The handcart company was divided into “hundreds,” each with its own leader, who was responsible to make sure that his people were safe.

Her thoughts were a torrent. She'd seen the cold look that Eliza Gadd had given her earlier, and then the woman made everything worse by slapping one of the townsfolk. The company had traveled six thousand miles without such trouble, and just when it looked as if they'd make it across America safely, this had to happen.

She found Father Jens sooner than she'd imagined. He'd wandered up to a store and stood peering through a window at a red coat. Around him, there were only English and Scots.

So Baline took the opportunity to speak to Jens privately about something that was bothering her. She would never have asked the question if other Danes were near, but the English that surrounded them could not understand her, so she spoke freely. Baline felt that it was like being invisible, but only her words were invisible.

“Father Jens,” Baline asked, “why are the English so weak?”

Jens Nielsen was not her real father. He had been a missionary back in Denmark and had lived with her family for awhile. Baline's real parents had not been able to sell their farm this season and had therefore not had the money that they needed to emigrate. So Jens had offered money to the family to send Baline ahead, as they had done with her older sister Margrethe, a year before.

Baline's parents jumped at the chance. In Denmark, the Lutheran church was an official arm of the government. The parish priest was in charge of

the schools, and the local priest on their island of Falster, Peder Kock, hated Mormons. He regularly published slanderous articles in the paper and stirred up mobs, encouraging them to attack and even kill the Mormon missionaries, and to destroy the homes of Mormons.

Jens Nielsen had been attacked more than once and had even tried to swear out a warrant against his foes. Yet the judge had told him, "There is no law that protects Mormons in Denmark."

At school, Baline had found that she, too, incurred Peder Kock's wrath. The boys often pulled her hair or pushed her to the ground, and when they did, the priest would look away. She felt sure that the boys did it only to win his approval. Once, after school, some boys had pushed her into a filthy mud puddle, yellow with cow pee, and rubbed her face in it.

Baline didn't think that this was too bad. Christ had suffered worse things for the gospel's sake. Yet it terrified Baline's mother. Baline had heard her parents whispering at night when they thought she was asleep.

"We must send her away," her mother had said. "Baline will soon be ten years old, and she will begin budding into womanhood. The boys will try ... they will rape her, as they tried to do with Margrethe."

Baline's mother had begun sobbing while her father comforted her.

Baline hadn't known the meaning of the word "rape" at the time, and still wasn't quite certain what it entailed. She had asked one of the women at church, and the woman had responded by telling her about how dogs mate and then have puppies. She said, "That is what the men try to do to you."

Baline had turned red with embarrassment and grown dizzy at the thought. She had run out the back door of the meeting house and nearly vomited. She had never imagined anything so vile. She was terrified that some evil man would try to make her have puppies.

"Weak?" Jens asked, pulled from his reverie. "What makes you think the English are weak?"

"You know what I mean," Baline said. She didn't like talking this way about the English. Some of them, like Mary Hurren and Agnes Caldwell, were quickly becoming her best friends. "Sister Gadd just slapped a man. She thinks the English are better than me, but they're not. They are uglier than Danes, and smaller. They have the crooked teeth. And they are more evil: on the ship, some English boys and girls were caught kissing. No Dane

would ever do that! And then last week, Captain Willie had to reprove them. He said that some of the English men were sneaking into farmers' barns at night and milking their cows, stealing milk, and one of them had even killed a piglet!"

"A man will do terrible things when he gets hungry enough," Jens said, apologizing for the English saints. "We should not speak evilly about others, especially our own."

Baline reached up with one toe and scratched the back of her leg. The mosquitoes were terrible here near the river. Her legs felt as if they were made of lead. She'd just walked five miles today, over three hundred miles in the past month. So her legs were lead inside and covered with burning welts on the outside. She was weary and looked forward to the rest that was promised for the next day as they prepared for the hard part of the journey, but she didn't relish staying here with all of the mosquitoes.

"We must also be truthful," Baline said. "And the truth is that the hard part of our journey has not yet begun. Yes, the flour we get isn't enough to keep us from staying hungry, and many of the children cry at night, but the pangs are not too bad.

"And even if they were worse, my hunger does not excuse me from stealing another person's food," Baline said with the kind of pure wrath that is felt only by the very young. "You are the one who taught me that!"

Jens sighed and seemed to think. Then he admitted, "You are right. Their hunger does not excuse their sins. Yet there is more to it. Perhaps their hunger is greater than yours, or perhaps they have less tolerance for it. Did you ever think of that? A thousand years ago, our ancestors were the kings of the sea, the Vikings. You know of them?"

There were old Viking ruins near her school back in Denmark. Rounded stones were carved with ancient runes for Freya and Thor, the gods that her ancestors believed protected the village. "Yes," Baline said. "I know of them."

"Then you know that they sailed across the ocean each summer, plundering villages and carrying away the women to make them captive, in order to prove their courage to the gods. They went to England, and to the shores of France, and always they took away the most beautiful women and brought them home to wife."

Baline nodded, for she had heard this. “So?”

“A woman and a man, they are like horses. If you mate two fine horses, they will give you handsome foals. People are the same. If a handsome man marries a pretty girl, their children will be nice to look at—like you!”

He reached down and pinched Baline's nose. Baline knew that she wasn't really pretty, not like some girls. She had the big bones of a farm woman or a warrior, but she also had a winning smile, and she was happy all of the time, so other children flocked around her.

“So, that is why Danes are handsome?” Baline asked.

“The ugly girls, and the weak ones that no Viking wanted, they stayed in England, and got married. They gave birth to children with crooked teeth, like trolls, and ugly faces. But the pretty women in Denmark, they gave birth to handsome children. And that is why, today, the Danes are the most beautiful and the strongest people in the world.

“And that is why the English are weak today and are so easily overcome.”

Jens fell silent for a moment, then whispered, “Don't tell this to your English friends, okay? We don't want to hurt their feelings.”

Baline stood for a moment, feeling sad and in shock. Agnes Caldwell had the crooked teeth, a little. Her face was pretty, almost elfin, but she was imperfect. Even Mary Hurren had kinky, brittle hair.

“Then it is our fault that they are weak?” Baline asked. “We stole the strength from them, and the beauty?”

“It is not your fault,” Jens said. “You stole nothing from them. It was your ancestors a thousand years ago who did it. And now, you have a chance to return it. Because they are weak, they will need the strength of a good person like you. You can be their example.”

Baline nodded solemnly. Because they are weak, she realized, they have little self-control. That is why Agnes Caldwell falls behind the handcarts so often. That is why Mary Hurren weeps so bitterly when she gets hungry.

“So, they will need me to be strong,” she said. “Not just strong enough to pull their handcarts, but strong enough to be faithful even when their hearts are breaking.”

Jens said thoughtfully, “If you would really be strong, there is some thing you should know. You can do more good with God's help than you

can ever do on your own. Did you know that you can be like an angel?”

“When I die?” Baline asked.

“No, you can be one now,” Jens said. “The word *angel*, it means ‘one who speaks for God.’ If God inspires you to say something to another person, to give them words of warning or of comfort, it is the same as being an angel. In the Doctrine and Covenants, God says, ‘Whether I speak by my own mouth, or by the voice of my servants, it is the same.’ And so, when you speak under inspiration, it is the same as if you were an angel.”

“I see,” Baline said, but only because she was afraid to disagree with someone as wise and kind as Jens.

“Let me tell you a story,” Jens said. “When I first joined the church, I was sad one day because I felt like I was of no use to anyone. I wanted to preach the gospel, but I was not very good at reading, and so I did not know the scriptures. So, one morning, I prayed to God to help me do some good in the world.

“That morning I got up very early to take some ducks to the Saturday market. The fog in the streets was so dense that it made the cobblestones as slick as if it had just rained. I was walking through the streets, almost blinded by fog, when I thought I heard a distant sound of crying.

“Almost, I paid no attention to the sound, but suddenly I remembered my prayer, and I thought, perhaps this is my chance to do some good.

“So I began walking through the fog, searching for the girl that was crying, and as I did, I began to get frightened. Whoever it is, I thought, she will be a stranger. How will I introduce myself? She will think I am being forward, and make fun of me.

“Besides, I thought, it is probably nothing. It is probably some girl crying because her cat got trampled by a horse or because her nose has a hump on it.

“At last, after walking nearly eight blocks, I found the girl. She was huddled in an alley, shivering with cold while her head rested on her knees.

“ ‘What will I say?’ I wondered. Then she looked up at me, and I did not have to say anything at all. The girl that I had thought would be a stranger was someone I had known as a child, back when I lived in Lolland. She was living a hundred miles away from me, and I had not seen her in seven years. She was my best friend's little sister, Mareska. When last I had

seen her, she was a child no older than you, but now she was a young woman.

“ ‘Mareska,’ I said, ‘what are you doing here? Why are you crying?’

“ ‘I came looking for you,’ she said, ‘but I could not find you.’ It turned out that she had joined the church in Lolland, but the persecution was so bad, her brother begged her to come to Copenhagen and find me, hoping that I could take her in and she could live quietly where no one would know that she was a Mormon. She did not know that I had become one, too! The poor thing, she had run out of food and money and had not eaten for three days.”

To Baline, it sounded as if Jens was speaking of things that had happened long ago. It was like listening to stories from the Bible.

“Did she live through it?” Baline asked.

Jens laughed. “Of course she is still alive. She is Mareska Knutson. She is standing right over there!”

He jutted his chin toward a young woman who stood down the street, holding her two-year-old son up on her shoulder so that he could see.

“Oh,” Baline said, feeling in awe.

Jens spoke softly, more solemnly, “Now, every night, you see me walking in the evening through the fields. My wife will tell you that I am thinking, but really, I am listening, listening very hard to see if I can hear the voice of God. Most of the time, he speaks so softly that even when we struggle to hear him, we find it hard to understand what he wants. But if you listen sincerely, Baline, sometimes he will call you to be his servant. He won't command you all of the time, for he does not want to be our puppet-master. So he asks that we study the word of God as found in the scriptures and do good to others of our own free will. Yet when the need is great, he will ask you to help. And why should he not ask you instead of some angel? Isn't it easier to ask you to help someone next door, than to send an angel all of the way from heaven?”

Baline fell silent and stood listening for a still, small voice inside her, to see if God wanted anything now, but she didn't feel anything.

From down the line, Captain Willie shouted, “Move out! Move 'em on out!”

He was pointing north, away from the ferry docked on the river, as shiny as a new coin.

“What is this? What is going on?” Jens asked.

Jens, like many Danes, couldn't understand more than ten words of English, but Baline was studying her new language diligently. Brother Peder Mortensen was wealthy, and he had a book of English words. He let Baline read it all that she wanted so that she was learning fifty new words a day. Beyond that, she tried to play with the English children almost exclusively. So that even though she did not speak English like a native, she could usually understand what she heard. Many of the Danish saints were in awe of her mastery of the language, and they whispered that she had “the gift of tongues.”

Baline listened for a moment as some of the settlers relayed orders down the line.

“We must leave the town,” Baline said, “because of the trouble that Eliza Gadd started. It is too dangerous to stay.”

“But what about our shopping?” Jens asked. This was the last city they would find for more than a thousand miles. Like everyone else, he had wanted to buy some supplies.

Baline just shook her head and went back to her handcart. She had hoped to be able to ride the boat upriver, but Captain Willie did not want to leave his people in town, not with the present threat.

So the whole company marched along the Missouri River for ten more miles, taking no rests, not even stopping for a bite to eat. The sun was sweltering, and it grew humid beneath the cottonwood trees along the river. Mosquitoes flocked around them.

As they walked, Baline wandered among the handcarts, listening to people.

Even some of the Danes had begun to complain. One of the men, Brother Hansen, had stopped in town long enough to talk to a Dane who worked as a teamster. The Dane had left a Mormon wagon train two years earlier, and he'd told Brother Hansen about the high wages paid here in town, and now Hansen spread the news as if he were the town crier.

So it was late in the muggy afternoon when the company stopped to rest. Across the river, not half a mile away, were green fields thick with

cattle. A settlement had been built there by the church, and a town was springing up around it—one with a gristmill and a new bank and a few houses in various phases of construction.

The ferry came up around the bend after they stopped. It had a genuine steam engine that belched as its piercing whistle sounded. It drew up to shore, and a man shoved a gangplank onto the shore and began loading.

Not everyone could fit on the boat at once. The Scotts and some of the English were ferried across first. Then it was the Danes' turn.

But as the ferry was loading, Brother Hansen stood beside his hand cart, his wife in his shadow, and watched everyone leave.

Some of the men went to talk to him, and an argument ensued. "I am staying," he said adamantly. "I have an offer of a good job!"

The leader of the hundred for the Danes was Johan Ahmanson, a tall young Swede with sandy hair. He stood with Hansen, who was a younger man with only a mouse of a wife, and tried to reason with him. "We did not come for money," Ahmanson said. "We came because it is God's will."

"We are going no farther!" Hansen bellowed, and he glared up at Ahmanson. "This is my decision to make."

Many people had left the company along the way—some in New York, others in Chicago. It was a bad thing to separate from the saints. Those who did so often apostatized from the church. Only a couple of Danes had left the company up until now.

Secretly, Baline felt glad to see him go. Hansen was a pudgy man who found it hard to pull a handcart. At the end of the day, he would eat his own rations and then demand that his wife give him her food, too.

No one liked him.

Ahmanson shook his head sadly, as if sorry to see him leave. "Yes, it is your decision to make. I won't try to stop you, but we will have to settle accounts ..."

At this, Hansen's face turned red, and he got blustery. "Settle accounts?"

Ahmanson nodded. "Of course. You borrowed money, and now you must make arrangements to pay it back."

Hansen had not been a wealthy man. He had not been able to pay for his passage across the ocean or for his train fare to Chicago. Most of the money

that he'd used was borrowed. Now, if he wanted to leave the company, he would have to pay up.

Brother Madsen, the clerk for the Danes, got his ledger and read off Hansen's debts. He had spent all that he had to get here, and he still owed seventy dollars for boat fare to Peder Mortensen, a wealthy old crippled cobbler. He owed another \$3.82 to Father Jens for some tin pans that he had bought in New York.

Hansen had no money at all, so he wrote a note swearing to send money to Peder Mortensen. It was money that Baline felt sure the Mortensens would never see.

Father Jens tried to discourage Hansen from leaving the company. "I don't want you to send money to me," Father Jens said reasonably. "It costs seven dollars to send a letter across the prairie. It would be cheaper just to give me the pans!"

Of course, giving Father Jens the pans would create a hardship on Hansen. He would have no way to cook his food until he bought new ones.

"I can't give you the money, and I won't give you the pans back!" Hansen said.

Father Jens was a big man. At six feet six inches tall, he towered over almost everyone. He wasn't just tall, he was strong, too. Hansen didn't dare lift a hand against him.

"You can't just keep the pans," one elder in the group said. "To do so would be like asking a man if it is all right to rob him."

Several others nodded sagely, and some of them crowded close to Hansen. There had been much anger in camp at how he mistreated his wife, and it was obvious that some of the men would have welcomed a reason to fight.

Hansen was growing angrier by the minute, his face turning red and his eyes widening. He said, "This is robbery! This is robbery!"

Captain Ahmanson reached into the back of the handcart and took out the pans. "No, stealing a man's pans is robbery. We are only doing what is right!"

Hansen glared at Ahmanson, then at Father Jens, but all that he could do was run to his handcart and march away, his legs stiff from wrath.

"He will make trouble for us," Father Jens said with certainty.

Captain Ahmanson carried the tin pans to Jens's cart and put them in. He asked, "What trouble could he make?"

Jens shook his head. "I don't know. And that's what worries me ... "



Because of this altercation, Baline had to wait for the boat to come back on its third docking. Even then, it was crowded with settlers and hand carts. Jens Nielsen, his wife, Else, and his little five-year-old son, Niels, all got boarded off toward the bow of the boat.

A few feet away, young Samuel Gadd stood on the ferry, hanging over the rail, staring west with a dreamy gaze, a sweet grin plastered on his face as if he'd just gotten his first kiss.

Like Baline, he was ten years old. He had brown hair that fell into his hazel eyes, and his skin was freckled.

"Vat are you smiling at?" Baline asked.

Samuel licked his lips. "I had a dream last night," he said. "I dreamt that we reached Zion. It was so beautiful!"

Baline was immediately riveted, for she had often heard fascinating stories about prophetic dreams, but to her surprise, Samuel's mother glanced down at him, her eyes pinched with concern.

"I dreamt," Samuel said, "that I was walking through a desert of sand so red it was like rust. It was so deep that my feet sank with each step, as if I was trudging through snow.

"The sun was going down, and over a hill I saw glorious lights, pale blue, and so I ran to the top of the hill and looked down on a city, a fantastic city, unlike anything I've ever dreamt or could imagine. It had spires like the House of Commons, but they rose up impossibly tall, and there were broad domes in the city, too, held up by slender columns. All of the buildings looked as if they were made not with stone or brass, but looked as if the walls were sculpted of light. They shone like clear glass. And all of these spires and domes rose up high into the air, glimmering, like monuments.

"At the heart of the city was a great light, burning and smoking, as if the sun had fallen to earth and set fire to everything around it, and I knew that God was there, giving it light.

“So I ran out of the desert, onto a street of gold so clean that it was like ... like a clear pool on a spring morning, hidden deep within the forest.”

Now there were several people around Samuel, hanging onto every word. The Mormons believed in dreams, believed that God could talk to a man in dreams, and Baline felt sure that this one was of God.

“I saw marvelous things there, things that I cannot even begin to describe,” Samuel said. “Now I know that the artistry of people is nothing when compared to the artistry of God: I saw a sculpture of a beautiful woman carved from water, as clear as leaded crystal, only the water hung in the air above me as if just waiting for permission to drop.

“I saw a bench in the park that was more comfortable than any bed I ever dreamed of, and the Holy Spirit told me that God had made it just for me, as a place to rest, and that he knew every inch of me, and there could not be a more perfect place for me to sit.

“I saw the Prophet Joseph riding a fine, tall roan horse down the streets, and—”

“Birds?” Baline asked. “Did you see any birds in Zion? Or flowers?” Baline had always hoped that there would be birds in heaven.

“I saw a place, a huge archway in the city, and hanging vines swept down the wall for hundreds of feet, with their white flowers glittering in the shadows like stars, while hummingbirds darted from blossom to blossom, sparkling like emeralds when the sun took them!”

There were nods of approval from the listeners, and one woman declared, “It is from God.”

But Samuel's mother, Eliza Gadd, looked sad and hurt. “Don't get your hopes up, Samuel,” she said. “I don't want to see you break your heart. There won't be any castles sculpted from light when you get to Salt Lake City, just a few houses made of mud, all plastered over logs. And you won't see God burning in any bushes, just fat old Brigham Young squatting there like a toad.”

Baline gasped to hear her speak of the prophet in such a manner, but then remembered that Eliza was just a gentile.

“But,” Samuel explained to his mother, “it wasn't a dream about Zion as it is now. This is just the beginning. I saw Zion as it will be, someday, when God makes it his home.”

Sister Gadd just shook her head. “Don't get your hopes up,” she said again.

Baline wished desperately that she could have seen Samuel's dream of Zion, but she had to console herself with the thought that she could help build it.

As the ferry carried Baline across the Missouri, she glanced up at Jens. He was a good man, but didn't understand a word of English.

He was gazing back toward the retreating shore of Iowa. A dozen families stood staring sadly at the boat for a long moment, some waving, some hiding their faces in shame; almost as one they turned away and began trudging sheepishly back toward town.

These were the English deserters.

Baline had finished the easy part of the journey, the walk through Iowa, and even that was too hard for many people. Three hundred miles had worn out more than just shoes. Some of the deserters said that they planned to come west next year, when they had earned enough money for teams and wagons, but everyone knew the truth: such people would probably never earn enough money. They were joining the old world, full of its strife and corruption. They were apostates.

But Baline was determined to walk to Zion, barefoot as she was, to make a new world among the people that were one in heart, where she would be free to live the gospel without interference from the mobs and the government.

Now Baline looked up to Jens. He was staring off at the apostates, lost in thought. Obviously he felt bad, and perhaps he wondered if he should have just let Niels take his pans.

The waters of the Missouri were dark and brown and seemed to roil like boiling coffee as they rolled swiftly along. No fish jumped in the river, though many mosquitoes danced upon its surface.

Baline went to the handcart and shoved the tin cookware that they had taken from the Hansens under a tarp. It wasn't much—a couple of thin sauce pans and some plates. The cooking fires had blackened their bottoms.

“What will you do with this?” Baline asked Father Jens. “Try to sell it?”

“Maybe we can use them to fix the handcarts,” Jens suggested. “I will nail those pans over the hubs, to keep out the dirt, and I will nail the plates

around the rims of the wheels, to strengthen them.”

Baline had seen others using makeshift bits of tin to fix their carts. Now it would be their turn, and she understood why Jens had kept the cookware.

Suddenly the ferry lurched as it hit the Nebraska shore, and all across the ferry, men shouted and threw their hats into the air, and some men hugged their wives and kissed them right in public.

“What happened?” Jens asked. “Why are they celebrating?”

Baline cocked her head and listened. “Say good-bye to the United States,” one of the men was shouting. “Woo-hoo! And hurrah for Zion!”

An old woman began to sob as her white-haired husband held her close. “No more mobs,” she whispered, tears streaming down her cheeks, “no more worrying about every sound in the night.”

Baline reported, “They are celebrating because we have left the United States. There are no more cities for a thousand miles. Never again will we have to face the persecution.”

Baline suddenly felt as if a weight had been lifted from her, a weight that she'd carried so long she'd forgotten that she sometimes stumbled from the load.

Joseph Smith had taught that the United States was founded by inspired men, the first country ever created where men could worship as they pleased. A month ago, she had been so happy to arrive, but that was before she'd faced the mobs in Indiana, Illinois, and Iowa. Now she was overwhelmed with relief at having escaped.

“We are now truly free,” she said, and tears began to stream from her eyes.

“Yes,” Jens whispered, and he leaned over the rail of the ferry and wiped his eyes with the back of his sleeves. “We are free. Thank God.”

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