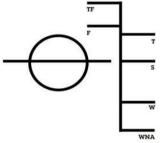


# THE PLIMSOLL LINE



By Dr. James Rasbeary

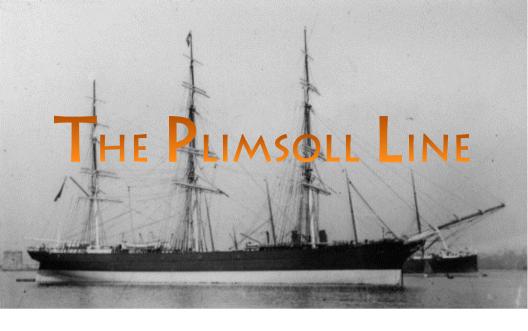
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In the mid-1800's, commercial ships were plowing the world's oceans like never before in the history of the world. Travelers, colonists, soldiers, traders, missionaries, and countless tons of cargo were carried back and forth under the Union Jack of British shipping. As can be expected, profit was the primary motive for most of what was being done. As can also be expected, some unscrupulous ship owners and captains allowed their ships to be dangerously overloaded to increase their profits. When these overloaded ships hit stormy water, they often capsized and were lost.

On December 13, 1865, the *SS London* left England bound for Melbourne, Australia. As she sailed down the Thames for the

ocean, a seaman seeing her pass remarked, "It'll be her last voyage... she is too low down in the water, she'll never rise to a stiff sea."

On January 10, the *London* had reached the Bay of Biscay, off the coast of France, when a storm suddenly struck the ship. The captain decided to head back for Plymouth, but the ship rolled heavily. Seawater poured over the ship, flooded the lower decks, and filled the engines. When the captain gave the order to abandon ship, only one of the lifeboats was successfully launched. Nineteen people crammed into the craft, which was only designed to hold twelve. *Two hundred and twenty passengers were lost at sea*. The nineteen survivors were rescued two days later by a passing vessel.

The subsequent inquiry by the British Board of Trade blamed the loss of life and cargo on the fact that the ship was overloaded with 345 tons of railway iron, as well as fifty tons of coal stored above deck, which blocked the scupper holes and prevented the drainage of seawater.

The disaster helped arouse attention in Britain to the dangerous overloading of what were then called "coffin ships." One Member of the British Parliament, **Samuel Plimsoll**, took up their cause. Over a number of years, he fought to reform shipping

procedures to protect the lives of seamen and passengers from loss. In 1872, a Royal Commission on unseaworthy vessels was established; in 1876, the United Kingdom Merchant Shipping Act instituted what as since been known as "the Plimsoll Line."

The Plimsoll Line, now used on shipping worldwide, indicates the draft of a ship and the legal limit to which a ship may be loaded for specific water types and temperatures. There are different load levels for salt or fresh water, for example, because salt water has greater salinity and thus greater buoyancy. Warm water provides less buoyancy than cold water. Ships may not be loaded above these limits. The Plimsoll line says, "This ship can handle this much of a load under these conditions and no more."

It is a great comfort to know that the Christian's life also has a Plimsoll Line, invisible to us, but visible to our Owner & Captain. The Bible is very clear that God never allows us to be overloaded:

↓ 1Co 10:13 There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.

Your loving Heavenly Father will never – never! – allow your life to be overloaded with burdens you cannot bear. He knows

exactly how much you can carry under different circumstances. He knows your limits. He knows how much you can bear in fresh water and out on the open seas. He knows how much you can bear through calm, sunny days, and how much you can bear in the rough, frigid waters that so often come into our lives. He will not allow on board one pound more than we can bear. He will never let our vessels sink below the invisible Plimsoll line that only His omniscient eye can see.

1 Corinthians 10:13 is a promise to lean upon. It will provide the ballast we need in the rough waters of life! There will not be a temptation — a temptation to evil, a trial of my faith, a burden in God's will for my life, a problem to be faced or borne — that is greater than my ability to bear. Accepting this promise by faith is how we can sail the seas of life without faltering, failing, or forsaking the will of God.

Moses came to a point when he felt that God had overloaded his life. A year after leading the children of Israel out of Egypt, a storm of circumstances caused Moses to falter in his faith.

♣ Num 11:11 And Moses said unto the LORD, Wherefore hast thou afflicted thy servant? and wherefore have I not found favour in thy sight, that thou layest the burden of all this people upon me? Then, Moses made a statement that many of God's people, in the depths of discouragement, have echoed since:

#### ♣ Num 11:14 I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me.

Have you ever felt like your life has been overloaded? Perhaps you feel this way even now. Perhaps you think that God has placed more on you than you can safely bear. Perhaps, in your heart if not with your lips, you have said, "Why should I have to bear this burden? What did I do to deserve this? Take this burden away! It is too heavy for me."

It is the author's hope that a study of this low point in Moses' early days of leadership will be an encouragement to you. Let us consider:

#### FIRST, NOTICE THE LOAD MOSES CARRIED.

What could possibly cause Moses, the great man of God, to break down in such a way? Well, let us remember that God has no Supermen, only faithful men. Moses was a spiritual giant, but he was not impervious to the hardships of leadership or reality. He was, like Elijah and every other sinful man to ever live, "subject to like passions as we are" (James 5:17). Let us therefore examine some of the circumstances in Moses' life at that time, and see if

any of them are similar to the loads that perhaps we may be bearing, if not on the same scale as Moses in the wilderness.

#### 1. He was new on the job.

This event took place about one year after leaving Egypt. They had not yet come to Kadesh-barnea, where the spies discouraged the people and they were condemned to forty years in the wilderness. This was before Korah's rebellion, and before Moses' struck the Rock and was, as punishment, barred from the Promised Land.

They were fresh out of Egypt, and Moses was new on the job. He did not have the benefit of years of experience. There was no manual to consult. No doubt, he had had extensive training while growing up in Pharaoh's household for forty years — but he had spent the last forty years tending his father-in-law's sheep on the backside of the desert. To say that he was "rusty" would have been an understatement.

Certainly, nothing he had done prepared him fully for the task that was now at hand.

Transition times can be very difficult. Sometimes, when we are new on the job, taking on new responsibilities, new ministries, new facets of life — or several of these at once - it can get absolutely overwhelming.

Perhaps you are a newlywed trying to adjust to married life. Perhaps you have just had your first child, and you are learning "on the job" just how many adjustments a child brings. Perhaps you have a new job or career and you are having a tough time learning to meet the demands of a new company or employer. Perhaps you have just taken your first pastorate, or just arrived on the mission field. How you longed for it! But now the responsibilities are settling in, and you are trying to settle into the responsibilities! Perhaps you have begun home schooling your children. Perhaps you have just taken a church ministry.

You are just getting started, and maybe things have not worked out as you thought they would, and you are starting to think that God has loaded you past your Plimsoll line.

I would encourage you to wait another year before you make any drastic decisions. It is amazing how different that job, that field, that pastorate, that Sunday School class or bus route, that church ministry, that family responsibility, will look after you've been doing it for 52 more weeks. Hang in there! God has NOT loaded you past your Plimsoll Line, though you may wonder at times!

#### 2. The job was extremely complex and difficult.

As in many cases, the pictures we have all seen in our family Bibles of the Wilderness Wanderings do not do justice to the real situation. Often, when we see pictures of the tents surrounding the Tabernacle, they resemble a Boy Scout Jubilee more than what the camp of Israel must have looked like in reality.

Moses was not responsible for a few hundred or even a few thousand people. Or even a few *hundred* thousand people. The children of Israel most certainly numbered at least two million strong, and some believe as many as three million.

The city of Dallas, Texas, has a population of 1,100,000. Moses was responsible for a least twice that many people – *in the wilderness*.

Moses had his hands full. He was trying to get them to the Promised Land, trying to make sure that things were done decently and in order, receiving and writing down the laws of God, building the Tabernacle and establishing the proper worship procedures, and taking care of all the details for what was basically a moving city with no infrastructure.

Perhaps your situation isn't that tough – but its tough enough for you. Maybe you feel that you are in over your head - that you have bitten off more than you can chew. Perhaps you are thinking that God has led you into a situation that is more than you can

handle. Or perhaps you think that you have missed God's will and gotten pulled into something that it would be best to give up and get away from as fast as possible. Moses felt that way.

#### 3. He met with great disappointments early on.

Everything in Egypt was amazing. Moses saw God work in miraculous ways, culminating with their deliverance through the Red Sea on dry ground and the destruction of Pharaoh and his armies.

He left the people in what he thought were the capable hands of Aaron and went up into Mount Sinai to meet with God. And what happened? The people quickly turned back to idolatry and wickedness.

No doubt, Moses thought, "What have I gotten myself into? Is this the crowd that I get to lead? What did I do to deserve this bunch of rebels and reprobates?"

Disappointment is a heavy burden to bear. A long string of disappointments in people can take the heart out of any spiritual leader. You may get so frustrated with disappointments that you cry out in discouragement, "Is this the church I get to pastor? Is this the field I get to serve in? Is this the ministry that I am stuck with? Are these the people that I have to put up with? What have

I gotten myself into?" Or, worse, "What has God put me into? Why has He given me more than I can bear?"

#### 4. He had to deal with difficult people.

Moses had enough problems without people problems. There was more than enough to do when everyone was on their *best* behavior. Unfortunately, that was seldom. When we study the circumstances that led to Moses' discouragement, we find at the bottom of it a "mixed multitude" and a bunch of whining, complaining people:

- ♣ Numbers 11:1-2 And when the people complained, it displeased the LORD: and the LORD heard it; and his anger was kindled; and the fire of the LORD burnt among them, and consumed them that were in the uttermost parts of the camp. (2) And the people cried unto Moses; and when Moses prayed unto the LORD, the fire was quenched.
- ♣ Numbers 11:4-6 And the mixt multitude that was among them fell a lusting: and the children of Israel also wept again, and said, Who shall give us flesh to eat? (5) We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick: (6) But now our soul is dried

away: there is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes.

Complaining! Whining! Murmuring! Blaming Moses for everything. How quickly they forgot the Lord! When Moses walked home from his office after a long day of solving difficult problems, he heard everyone weeping and crying in their tents because they did not like their dinner, and it upset him.

♣ Num 11:10 Then Moses heard the people weep throughout their families, every man in the door of his tent: and the anger of the LORD was kindled greatly; Moses also was displeased.

God was upset. Moses agreed. However, Moses took it a step further. He was upset with the people of Israel AND the Lord! They provoked his spirit, as they would do again later, and he spoke foolishly in his frustration:

♣ Psalms 106:32-33 They angered him also at the waters of strife, so that it went ill with Moses for their sakes: (33) Because they provoked his spirit, so that he spake unadvisedly with his lips.

People problems exasperate spiritual leaders. Don't we have enough to keep us busy? Isn't there enough work to do when everyone is on their best behavior! There is a world dying and going to hell and we want to complain and fuss about Moses and Aaron and this leader or that program, and do nothing to improve anything. The childishness, carnality, worldliness, immaturity, irresponsibility, poor character, and out right sinfulness often found among God's people has driven many a spiritual leader to anger, frustration, a provoked spirit, and foolish decisions!

Church member, are you a blessing or a burden to your spiritual leaders? Is your attitude a blessing? Or are you a pain in the neck? Are you a source of encouragement or does your pastor have a special bottle of aspirin with your name on it? Are you a source of thanksgiving or a source of heartache? Do you provoke him to "love and good works" (Heb 10:24) or do you provoke him to anger and unadvised speech (Ps. 106:33)? Are you a reason that the pastor stays with the work, or are you a reason that he sometimes feels like throwing in the towel?

This pastor can say from his own experience that people problems take more out of a pastor than any other kind of problem. In starting a church and trying to build it up, we have faced financial and facility problems that were tremendous. Yet none of those compared to the heartache, frustration, pain, discouragement and even depression brought about by people problems.

What about other spiritual leaders in your church? Some Sunday School teachers never receive a Thank You note for their faithfulness in teaching their class; but let little Lord Fauntleroy not get a piece of candy for acting up and his mother will jump down that teacher's throat over it. Shame! It is no wonder that so many spiritual leaders reach a point, as Moses did, of, "Why am I even trying to do this, anyway? I'm in over my head; no one wants me; I can't handle this anymore."

Please, don't be part of the "difficult people." Be like Aaron and Hur when they held up Moses hands during the battle with Amalek (Exodus 17). Be the encourager. You might help someone who feels like they are overloaded.

If you are dealing with difficult people, then you must be in the ministry. The ministry is people – and those are the people that God has given to you. It may be that you need to change some to meet the needs of your particular ministry. Regardless, God has not overloaded you past your Plimsoll Line.

## 5. He was worn down by constant demands on his time and energy.

Exodus 18 reveals that Moses had more to do than he had time in his day. His father-in-law noticed:

♣ Exodus 18:17-18 And Moses' father in law said unto him, The thing that thou doest is not good. (18) Thou wilt surely wear away, both thou, and this people that is with thee: for this thing is too heavy for thee; thou art not able to perform it thyself alone.

Jethro then gave some good advice concerning delegation, which Moses followed. Nevertheless, we can see that the demands on his time were endless. No doubt, the weariness of his responsibilities, the endless toil, the pressure, the wear and tear on his mind, soul and body, must have had their effects.

It has been well said that if we do not come apart, we will come apart. We need time to rest our bodies, minds, and spirits. We need time alone with God. We need time with our families. We need diversions. However, sometimes life comes at us hard and we do not have such time to spare. Such can often happen during college, or when necessity requires a second job or overtime, or during an extensive project. You may not have a choice in such matters – but you should be aware that it might lead you to feel that God has loaded you past what you are able to bear.

We are discussing the load that Moses carried. There is one more aspect to consider:

#### 6. He had to deal with great loneliness.

It does not appear that Moses had a happy home life. His wife seems to have hated his calling and the sign of God's covenant with the Jews (Ex. 4:25-26). It seems that she was such a hindrance that he finally sent her back and did not take her into Egypt (Ex. 18:2). There are no indications that their marriage was either warm or happy. Later, he married an Ethiopian woman, which caused strife with his brother and sister (Num. 12:1).

What friends did Moses have? Joshua was his servant, but certainly not his peer. The only friend that Moses had was the LORD (Ex. 33:11). And what a Friend! However, there is in all of us a desire for human companionship, human friendship — close fellowship with people that know us, love us, and accept us as we are.

Loneliness is a heavy burden, but if it is the will of God, it will never be more than we can bear. Perhaps you are thinking, "If I just had some good friends, I believe that I could bear this burden. It is the loneliness that is the straw breaking this camel's back."

I often pray for my missionary friends, who spend so many years of their lives in foreign lands. Those who stay long enough develop friendships and often feel more at home on the field than they do back in the States. However, in those early years, there will be great, overwhelming loneliness.

I often pray for my friends who serve the Lord as evangelists. Most leave their wives and children behind as they travel across the country, sleeping in lonely hotel rooms and preaching to strangers. One evangelist friend described, after being gone for two weeks, flying in to the airport near his hometown. His wife met him there with a suitcase of clean clothes. After a few minutes together, she rode home with a friend while he took the truck and drove all night to his next revival meeting. Such is often the life of an evangelist.

Pastors often feel loneliness as well. Although we love our people, especially our Joshuas in the church, we often desire a friendship with peers – men with whom we do not need to wear the mantel of the pastorate, men that we can talk with and share our burdens with, men who will be our friends and fellow laborers in the work of the Lord.

The wives of ministers are often the loneliest of all. How often my wife has longed for the companionship of Christian ladies who would not expect her to "be the pastor's wife." How precious her friends are to her – but many a minister's wife, on the field, or

married to a pastor, evangelist, or staff member, has felt overloaded because of the extra burden of loneliness.

Yet loneliness is not limited to those "in the ministry." It comes to the widow or widower; to the wife whose husband is off in the service, or to the businessman on the road; to the teenager; to the college student away from home and his or her old friends. Loneliness is a burden.

These circumstances combined in just the right way at just the right time to cause Moses to have a breakdown in his faith. He thought that his load was too heavy for him to bear. He thought that God had allowed him to be loaded past his Plimsoll Line.

# SECONDLY, NOTICE THE LAMENT MOSES CRIED.

♣ Num 11:11 And Moses said unto the LORD, Wherefore hast thou afflicted thy servant? and wherefore have I not found favour in thy sight, that thou layest the burden of all this people upon me?

No, no, no, Moses! Don't blame the Lord! Alas, he did. And it was downhill from there:

■ Numbers 11:12-15 Have I conceived all this people? have I begotten them, that thou shouldest say unto me, Carry them in thy bosom, as a nursing father beareth the sucking child, unto the land which thou swarest unto their fathers? (13) Whence should I have flesh to give unto all this people? for they weep unto me, saying, Give us flesh, that we may eat. (14) I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me. (15) And if thou deal thus with me, kill me, I pray thee, out of hand, if I have found favour in thy sight; and let me not see my wretchedness.

In times such as these, it is good to go to the Lord in prayer. However, Moses did *not* pray a God-honoring prayer. Notice:

#### 1. Moses questioned God's will for his life.

He asked, "Wherefore hast thou afflicted thy servant? What did I do to deserve this? Why are you punishing me with the burden of these people?" When our hearts are not right, we will look upon our opportunity as a curse, or our privilege as a burden! It was Moses' opportunity to serve the Lord in a great way! It was his privilege to be God's man for His people.

#### 2. Moses cried out in self-pity.

He had "I" trouble. Go back and circle all of the personal pronouns – "I, my, me" – in his lament. Self-pity causes us to focus on ourselves. It causes us to feel martyred.

Someone has wisely said, "Self-pity is crying on the devil's shoulder." When we start feeling sorry for ourselves, the devil puts his arm around us and whispers, "There, there. That mean old' God sure hasn't done you right, has He? He sure overloaded you. It's not your fault. God expects way too much from you. Why don't you come on back and do things my way for a while?" Beware, Christian, of self-pity!

#### 3. Moses tried to disown his responsibility.

♣ Num 11:12 Have I conceived all this people? have I begotten them, that thou shouldest say unto me, Carry them in thy bosom...

Moses said, "Hey, I'm not their father. I don't have any responsibility to these people. I was minding my own business with my father-in-law's sheep out in the desert. I don't know why you expect me to bear them like they are my responsibility."

#### 4. Moses over-exaggerated his burden.

♣ Num 11:12 Have I conceived all this people? have I begotten them, that thou shouldest say unto me, Carry them in thy bosom, as a nursing father beareth the

## sucking child, unto the land which thou swarest unto their fathers?

When we are filled with self-pity, we tend to say some pretty foolish things. Who ever saw a nursing father? Such a creature does not exist.

Faith breaks down when we exaggerate our burdens. "I've got to bear all these people on my shoulders." No, Moses, God was bearing them on eagle's wings (Ex. 19:4).

We start to get sarcastic with the Lord and with others. That further feeds our self-pity: "No one's ever had it as bad as me. No one in this church understands my burdens. No one knows how hard I've got it." For some reason, over-exaggerating our burdens makes us feel better about ourselves, temporarily – but it puts us in a bad position spiritually.

#### 5. Moses cried out in faithlessness.

His prayer was ridiculous. It was full of self-pity, but most of all, it was a prayer of faithlessness. Instead of asking God to help him WITH the burden, he asked for deliverance FROM the burden. Then he issued an ultimatum that he would rather die than bear the burden another day.

♣ Numbers 11:14-15 I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me. (15) And if thou deal thus with me, kill me, I pray thee, out of hand, if I have found favour in thy sight; and let me not see my wretchedness.

He became one of several men in the Bible who tried to commit *suicide by prayer*.

Now that we have considered the load that Moses carried and the lament that Moses cried, let us consider one final thought:

#### FINALLY, THE LESSONS MOSES CONTRIBUTES.

What lessons can we learn from this story?

#### 1. Trust God to know what you can handle.

Is He our loving Heavenly Father? Does He know what is best for us? Is His will perfect? Is His grace sufficient? Is Romans 8:28 still true? Is Philippians 4:13 still in the Bible? Do we trust the promise of God in 1 Corinthians 10:13:

"There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it. Do you believe this? Do you recognize that your life has a Plimsoll line that only God can see? Do you acknowledge that He will never put one ounce more than you can bear upon your shoulders? Do you rest on His promise? This is what it means to live by faith.

### 2. Do not get the devil in you trying to get him out of someone else.

People are going to bring problems into your life. We all have a mixed multitude; we all have people in our lives that are intentionally or unintentionally difficult to bear. Nevertheless, do not let their problems ruin you.

#### 3. Remember that it is not your job to be GOD.

It would have been helpful if Moses could have had a good friend take him by the shoulders, looked him square in the eyes, and said, "Moses, it is not your job to be God. It is your job to be Moses. It is not your job to feed everyone, and provide water in the wilderness. It isn't your job to figure out which way to go and when. It isn't your job to solve everyone's problems. It's your job to be Moses and let God be God."

The funny thing is that everyone expected Moses to be God and were disappointed when he wasn't; yet, when he put his foot

down about something, they said, "Who do you think you are – God?"

People have not changed. In Lystra, the people first said that Paul was a *god*, and then they stoned him like a *dog*. People often expect the impossible from their spiritual leaders and then are disappointed when reality strikes home that they are just mere mortals after all.

However, we need to know who and what we are. It is not my job to be someone's God. I do not have to solve everyone's problems; I do not have to feed everyone; I am not the source of their provision; it is not my job to figure out God's personal will for everyone's lives; I don't have to have all the answers or pretend to be omniscient. Beware, dear leader, of developing a *Messianic Complex*. The people need a Messiah – but you are NOT Him. They need Jesus Christ. They need a personal relationship with God. You are His messenger, not His replacement. Feed the flock, preach the Word, pray for your people, win souls to Christ, do the best you can, but in the end it is God's job to be God.

#### 4. Beware of complaining about your burden.

God might take it away. God took some of His Spirit off Moses and distributed it to seventy other men. (Imagine how much power Moses had on his life that it could be divided among seventy men!) However, this means that Moses lost some of the grace or power that had been his.

Paul had a thorn in his flesh that hindered him, or so he thought. Three times, he brought this need to the Lord in prayer. Perhaps he reasoned with the Lord that he could serve Him so much more successfully if He would take the thorn away! Finally, the Lord gave His answer:

♣ 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

(10) Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.

Paul thought that losing the thorn would give him more grace; he discovered that the thorn was the secret of the grace that he enjoyed. Without the thorn, Christ's strength would not have been made perfect in his life. He would have lost grace. Paul then said that he rejoiced in his infirmities, stating that he did not want to lose one infirmity, reproach, necessity, persecution or distress IF IT WOULD MEAN LOSING ONE BIT OF GOD'S SUFFICIENT GRACE.

You may think, "If God would just take some of this off of me and give it to someone else, I could serve Him better. I could get more done." Beware. God might take some of it away – but do you really want to lose any of God's power or grace from your life?

Dear reader, thank you for taking the time to read this booklet. I trust that some of the truths have been a blessing to you. It should be an encouragement to us to know that each of us has a Plimsoll line, invisible to us but very visible to God. Our loving Heavenly Father never loads us down with a burden we cannot bear. He carefully measures out each burden, each problem, each cross, and fits them precisely to what we can handle in the situations we face.

Once upon a time, a man began to feel that his cross was simply too heavy to bear. He complained to the Lord about his burden. That night, he slept and dreamed that he was standing before the Lord in a vast room filled with crosses of various sizes. To his joyful surprise, the Lord invited him to lay aside his own cross and pick out one from the many in the room that would better suit his ability.

The man laid aside his cross and began to go through the various crosses in the room. Some he felt were too heavy; others he felt were too light – he could carry more than that for the Lord. Finally, he laid one across his shoulder and happily announced, "Lord, this cross is just perfect. This is the cross that I should bear."

To which the Lord answered, "My son, that is the cross you started with."

Always trust God to know what is best for you!



#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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