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Opening Doors Through Stories: Family

Writing from Newcomers to Regina





Opening Doors Through Stories: Family

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MESSAGE FROM REGINA OPEN DOOR SOCIETY

Writing is closely woven into our understanding of family, the people who raise us, the bonds we carry across borders, and the relationships that give us a sense of belonging. Through writing, memories of shared meals, inspiring struggles, joyful celebrations, and silent moments resurface, shaping our lives. From festive gatherings to small rituals passed down through generations, exploring family through storytelling offers a powerful way to reflect on love, identity, and connection.

In 2025, *Opening Doors through Stories: Family* celebrated the voices and creativity of our newcomer writers. For the eighth year, the Regina Open Door Society (RODS) Welcoming Community for Newcomers (WCN) program, in partnership with the Saskatchewan Writers' Guild (SWG), provided a space for newcomers to learn, grow, and share stories shaped by their experiences of family, culture, and belonging.

During November and December 2025, participants joined four engaging sessions led by local author Marie Powell, strengthening their storytelling skills and exploring family across cultures, generations, and festive traditions. This year's Chapbook reflects their resilience, imagination, and heartfelt reflections.

We thank all the contributors whose stories make this work shine. We hope *Family* inspires readers to celebrate, reflect, and reconnect with their own moments of togetherness, silence, and adventure. We value every story that brings our community to life.

Keith Karasin
Executive Director
Regina Open Door Society

MESSAGE FROM SASKATCHEWAN WRITERS' GUILD

In the fall of 2025, author Marie Powell led newcomers to Regina through the creation of new writing that has become our eighth chapbook, *Opening Doors Through Stories: Family*. There are many definitions of who makes a "family". There are families united by adoption, circumstance, or choice. It can mean those who are related through lineage, or groups who share common ancestry, or a group of people with common affiliations or united by certain convictions, like those found on sports teams, or connected by faith, or those who make up found families. Each of us decides and defines what "family" means for us. This chapbook explores contributors' personal reflections and interpretations of family and the impact on their lives. From the SWG, we welcome you to our growing family of writers in Saskatchewan. Enjoy.

Cat Abenstein
SWG Program Manager

INTRODUCTION BY MARIE POWELL

As the editor of *Opening Doors*, it has once again been my honour and my pleasure to work with these authors. Thanks to the support of the Saskatchewan Writers' Guild (SWG) and the Regina Open Door Society (RODS), this program gives newcomers to Canada a unique opportunity to improve their written English, without using AI programs or other digital assistance. Some of the writers in this issue have been published before, in previous issues or in other languages or countries, and some are new to the process of having their work published, but all have the chance to explore creative writing in English as an additional language.



Last fall, we came together for four workshops, hosted by RODS in a hybrid setting, with some participating in-person and others on Zoom. We developed our own ground rules to set up a safe space to share our writing. Our theme for this issue was “Family,” and we worked through a combination of presentations, writing prompts, free-writing, group discussion, and one-on-one feedback.

We quickly realized that, as a concept, Family has many facets, and even their exploratory writing often cut very deep. These writers met the challenge with soul-searching honesty and supported each other as they delved into the joys and disappointments that can occur in any family. During the four weeks following the workshops, we continued to work together by Zoom and email, as they refined and developed their work.

The writing and discussions that resulted have broadened my appreciation of the similarities and differences in our understanding of family, as a unit and a concept. The commitment of these authors to family life and to their writing craft shows in the fiction, creative nonfiction, and poetry that appear in this issue. As you thumb through these pages, we invite you to consider and expand your own observations of this important theme: Family.

Marie Powell
Editor



Original art (and detail on page 10) by Isabel Carvajal

Crows in Summer:

By Isabel Carvajal

One morning in the middle of summer, I was on my way to the supermarket, enjoying the sunlight filtering through the leaves of the trees, when two crows walked across the street very close to me. I had been living in Regina for a year, and it was the first time I had seen that ebony plumage.

My idea of crows only came from books and movies, usually associated with dark and sinister places like those Edgar Allan Poe wrote about. So, when I saw them in the middle of summer, I was surprised and immediately felt a connection with them because it made me think perhaps this is what it means to be an immigrant: to walk in an unusual environment, far from your home, far from your identity. This realization made me see beyond the stereotype associated with darkness because when researching popular culture, crows also symbolize wisdom and memory.

Understanding this additional perspective of crows, of preserving memories, gives them more meaning in my story. As an immigrant, the memories of my former life in Colombia—my family, the places, the feelings—are images that accompany me on this journey to preserve the connection between two worlds and two times. Indeed, many cultures believed this ebony bird “held within itself, the memories of past worlds, ancient ways of life, and precious secrets” (*El Cuervo Negro/The Black Crow*)¹ in the same way immigrants also cherish their memories of their past lives in other countries. Its black plumage reminds me of transformation: like the seed that germinates in the darkness, little by little, we sprout in a new land full of new experiences.

Seeing something as unusual to me as crows in the middle of summer and feeling that connection, I understood migration changes our perspective on many things. As immigrants, we leave our familiar context and, in that process, arrive in an unknown place. But over time, our roots expand, and what seemed strange becomes part of our history and, gradually, an extension of our home.

That doesn't mean we stop missing our former countries; there are many moments when nostalgia surfaces, like that afternoon when my memory took me back home, and I could smell the fresh fruit, hear the noise and music in the streets, everything chaotic and vibrant, the enthusiastic people talking and laughing. I can still feel the warmth of the people, the hugs and the food, the closeness that characterizes Latinos.

1 <https://www.navasfuneraria> (translated by Isabel Carvajal)

In my country, I grew up in two very different places: in the mountains and on the coast. In my hometown, mountains and endless staircases dominate the landscape. At night, the houses look like fireflies, all the city lights twinkle, and the reddish colour of the bricks is very characteristic of Medellín's neighbourhoods. I also lived in Urabá, a very lush, jungle-covered coastal region of Colombia with a beautiful sea. It has the most intense sunsets I've ever seen, other than those during the Canadian winter, which has sunrises and sunsets of equally intense colours, which is something that surprises me about winter, being such a cold season, with such warm colours in contrast.

Urabá is called the land of the sun; its climate is quite warm, and its vegetation and animals are diverse. It has a very large prairie area like Regina, but with different tropical vegetation and a more humid climate. In general, in Columbia, there is a greater variety of fresh fruits with delicious flavours, and that is one of the things I miss the most: mango, guava, pineapple, soursop, sapote, lulo, ochuba, mamoncillo, etc. These are some of my favourite fruits, but each region of Colombia has different varieties.

Unlike the slightly more acidic and firmer flavour of mangoes in Canada—although I've also managed to find sweeter mangoes here from Peru—their texture isn't the same. That's why I remember the sweet taste of the mangoes from my country so well. I lived with my parents and siblings in a country house surrounded by fruit trees and banana plantations. The farm was called La Palmera because there were enormous palm trees on both sides of the entrance.

One hot day, my brothers and I went to pick mangoes from the giant tree in our backyard. We had a container to collect them in, and my brother, who was more agile, climbed the tree and knocked the mangoes down, while we, excited by the feast ahead, tried to catch them in the container. When we had a good amount, we sat in the shade of the tree with our bounty. Sometimes we ate green mangoes with salt and lime, but this time they were ripe and sweet, my favorites.

I can still taste the smooth texture of those smaller, bright yellow mangoes; their aroma was fresh and fragrant. My memory is filled with the intense sweetness of the first bite, their soft, juicy fibre like nectar melting in my mouth. The honeyed scent and the fibrous, juicy consistency were incredibly stimulating to the senses, combined with the coolness of being under that tree that so generously offered us such delicious fruit, and the sensation of the fruit dripping down our arms—undoubtedly a gift from the earth and the sun.

We ended up stuffed from eating so many mangoes, but satisfied because they were delicious. The only thing I didn't like was the way the juice

stuck to our hands and some fibres got stuck in our teeth... partly because it was impossible not to get covered in the nectar dripping down our arms. But we washed it off well afterwards.

Every sensation, every memory makes our home real. When I look around and see that everything is different in Canada, even the opposite of my home, I understand the timeline, the limit of my memory, and my family are far away. And again, I feel like a crow in summer, far from my place, far from my home.

As immigrants, when we try to understand life in this new land, we may tell ourselves, yes, I miss the hugs, the food, the intense flavours in my mouth, the ripe mango, the days in the tropics. But if we change our perspective on what home is, we realize little by little, Canada has transformed into a new beginning, and our mindset changes. It's the open door to a new story when the crows come to walk with me in the summer. I am my home because home isn't just physical, it's also made of our old memories and the new ones that intertwine into a new start.

When Memories Walk and Shine

By Isabel Carvajal

Every moment you live shines in your memory like crows in summer.
Every story grows in your senses and lives in your memory.
Every flavour, like fresh fruit or a tropical climate, is a home for you.
I am my home because I carry my memories with me.

Every feeling winds through the cloudy days,
every moment connects me to my roots.
Every seed in new soil grows through dark nostalgia.
Every new story outlines your new home.
Words have windows to look into the past and present,
and memories walk in your head
when you see crows in summer.



Perfume

By Mukta Jahan Banu

Scent has no limit
it touches the spirit
sometimes it creates
voice like yours.

“Hello! How are you?”
“Is everything good?”
“Yes, I am okay.”

When you are not around
I feel more bound
like the flying bird
thrumming with the urge to go back to her nest.
She is craving rest.

This perfume—
it increases the volume of my heart’s song
singing for a new life
yearning to build a harmonious family with you.

It is longing for a gentle fragrance
one that will heal this wound
of my bitter past.

Family doesn’t only mean
the perfect infrastructure
Why not you and I?
Could we make a world for us?

One which we will hold with
care, trust, and love.

This perfume carries a hymn
of promises, of new beginnings
of a family and of us.



Healing And Acceptance

By Mukta Jahan Banu

Immigration.
Like a newborn, alone.
A new land
wide, white, waiting.
Can it ever be home?

One day, the white sky above
white snow all around
felt like a blank white page.
Is it fillable?

Time passed
and even the hardest ice began to melt.

Deep breath
Regina—a city too big to inhale.

Birds fly freely overhead,
their wings waving
opening possibilities,
new promises.

Honeymoon phase of rebirth, honeymoon phase of freedom,
honeymoon phase of singlehood.

Happiness and sadness arrived together.
Time came, time passed.
Red, purple, and yellow flowering around her.
Life had already started to find a new definition.
Every end is a new honeymoon.

A silent storm lived inside her heart—
struggling to build a life
on this land of the red leaf
on a white background.
Canada's flag—
a symbol of courage standing in snow.



Where was she?
The world of disconnectedness,
trying to find the connectedness.
Lost between missing, belonging
and tasting the small joys of success.

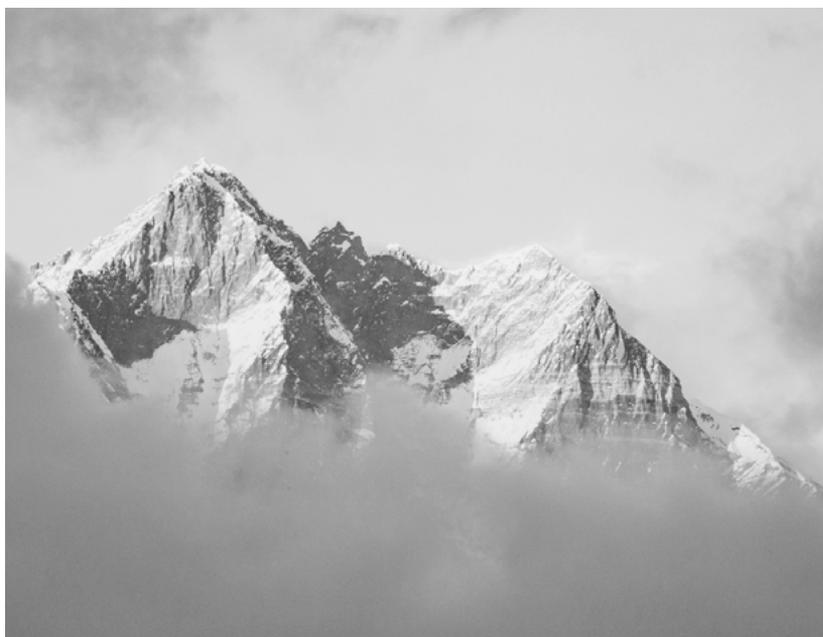
New people, new taste,
new affection, new attachments—
this new birth
painful, beautiful,
and strangely welcoming.

She looked around
and saw only the empty shadow
of those who were once her truth.

What was truth?
Who was she?
And who had she left behind?
The wind whispered, who am I?
Footsteps on melting snow
replied, Yes
You are.

Heavenly Journey to Everest Base Camp (EBC)

By Hasina Nasrin



Every time the four travel-holic friends got together on a cold, cozy evening with cha and jhalmuri¹, their talk turned to Everest. As always, Ananna was the leader of her friend group—not because she wanted to be, but because the other three happily let her take responsibility for their trips, along with the after-trip dinner. She was the one who made the spreadsheets, double-checked times, managed all costs and hotel bookings, and reminded everyone about documents they would have forgotten. Even what to wear for the weather was part of her plan.

But adventure? That belonged equally to all four of them.

Nasrin, the artistic soul of the group, saw beauty everywhere—even in chaos. She could turn a teacup or a cracked window into a photo worthy of a magazine cover. Salehin, on the other hand, was the group guardian—the kind who takes care of the whole team like a family. And then there was Parveen: calm, strong, but secretly the biggest adrenaline junkie of them all.

Together, they had traveled through deserts, beaches, forests, and cities. But the Himalayas were different. The mountains had called them for years, echoing in every

1 *Cha* is tea and *jhalmuri* is a spicy, tangy snack, popular in the Bengal region of India.

plan, every road trip conversation, every “one day we’ll do something crazy.”

Then the day came when Parveen forwarded a link.

“Everest Base Camp Helicopter Tour – From Kathmandu to Kalapathor via Lukla.”

Ananna immediately phoned her. “Really! Are you serious?”

Then Nasrin made a group call: “I’ve been waiting my whole life to meet the magnificent Everest.”

And just like that, a dream years in the making finally took flight.

From Dhaka, all four flew to Kathmandu. They rested at a hotel, and the next day they received a call: the helicopter tour had been canceled due to bad weather. Everyone was shattered and went out for a coffee session.

Suddenly, Ananna’s phone buzzed: the flight was on! They raced to the airport.

The first stop was Lukla airport. That helicopter pad was possibly the most dramatic runway on the planet. A cliff dropped off right at the end of the strip—no extra meters for mistakes. Ananna stood frozen, staring at the descending runway.

“Guys, are we sure this is safe? Like... absolutely, scientifically proven safe?”

The pilot, a handsome cheerful man, laughed. “No worries. One hundred percent. Ninety-nine-point-nine, okay? I have operated this flight at least a thousand times.”

“Sir, you’re not helping!” Ananna yelled.

Parveen doubled over laughing. She patted Ananna’s shoulder, “Relax. This is the best part.”

“Best part?!” Ananna repeated, horrified.

Salehin grinned, “Your screaming won’t be heard once we’re up, so keep quiet. Let me enjoy this, guys.”

Ananna turned her face into the cold wind, catching a bite of excitement in it. She laughed as Nasrin grabbed her arm, and all three friends pulled her with them to the helicopter. They helped each other climb aboard. Now all of them were living their dream.

The rotor blades began spinning, slicing the mountain air with increasing tempo. The helicopter vibrated like a beast waking from hibernation. Ananna squeezed her eyes shut. Nasrin held her camera firmly. Salehin held Ananna’s hand tightly and pressed her forehead to the glass, her smile wider than the horizon.

“Are you guys ready?” the pilot asked.

“Yes!” all four shouted.

The helicopter lurched upward. In just seconds, the runway vanished beneath them, the valley opened like an endless green throat, and they were airborne.

Ananna opened one eye. “OH MY GOD, WE’RE FLYING!”

“You can open both, genius,” Nasrin laughed.

Ananna did and gasped.

“I take everything back. This is incredible.”

And indeed it was. The hills rolled beneath them in waves of green and gold, dotted with tiny villages that clung stubbornly to cliff sides. Rivers flashed like silver threads. Prayer flags fluttered from rocky edges, scattering blessings into the sky.

Within minutes, they reached Namche Bazaar, the iconic Sherpa town shaped like a half-moon carved into the mountains.

“Look at how colourful it is!” Parveen almost pressed her face into the glass. “It’s like someone painted the village. Where are the rhododendrons, Mister Pilot?”

“They will be found in May, not now, beautiful lady.” The pilot smiled.

“It looks like a hidden kingdom,” Salehin said. “A mountain city for adventurers.”

Ananna pointed. “That’s where trekkers climb up and cry about altitude.”

“Says the person who almost cried during takeoff,” Parveen laughed.

“Hey! Emotions are valid!” Salehin protested.

“Namche is an important hub,” the pilot said. “Every climber comes here. Some stay one day, some stay three, some never leave.”

“Why never leave?” Nasrin asked.

“Because they fall in love with mountains.” He smirked.

“Understandable,” Salehin nodded. “Perhaps I’ll be one of them.”

The helicopter tilted slightly, giving them a sweeping view of the town—hotels stacked on terraces, stone-paved alleyways winding like puzzles, bright-blue rooftops glinting under the sunlight.

“I feel like crying guys,” Nasrin whispered. “Let me cry.”

All three squeezed her hand. As Namche shrank into a speck, the landscapes grew wilder and more dramatic. The mountains rose like sleeping giants, white and proud.

Pheriche appeared ahead—a peaceful settlement surrounded by vast, open spaces and glacier-fed streams.

“It feels like another planet,” Ananna murmured.

Parveen nodded. “Like a place where time moves differently. How peaceful!”

“A place where silence isn’t empty—it’s full of serenity,” Nasrin said softly.

Salehin raised a brow. “Bro... why are we suddenly poets?”

“Mountains do that,” Nasrin replied, with a smile.

The pilot pointed out peaks and valleys, telling them stories about expeditions, rescues, and the stubborn bravery of climbers. He explained that from here, two would be flying with him and the other two would wait in Pheriche.

“Me first! Me first!” All four shouted.

The pilot took out a coin from his pocket. The coin toss decided: Nasrin and Salehin would fly first. They landed at Pheriche, where Ananna and Parveen remained as their two friends flew off to the magnificent Everest.

“How serene it is here,” Ananna said.

“Let’s hide somewhere so that we never need to leave,” Parveen said.

“I feel the same.” Ananna laughed. “But let’s wait until we visit Kala Patthar, and hide there!”

Parveen and Ananna enjoyed the views from a public vantage point, taking photos and dancing with excitement. After about thirty minutes, the pilot returned to collect them, leaving Nasrin and Salehin in Pheriche.

Ananna watched in awe from the helicopter windows as the mountains and valleys of the Himalayans passed beneath them, serene and timeless. But the sky was about to reveal something far more magnificent. As the helicopter climbed, the world shifted. Clouds drifted below them. Frost edged the windows. The horizon turned into a jagged crown of white ice.

Finally, Everest appeared—the long-awaited moment.

It is not just a peak, Ananna thought. Not just a mountain. But a colossal force of nature rising above all creation. The helicopter slowed. All of them were silent.

“Is this real?” Ananna’s voice was barely a breath.

“I’ve seen pictures... but this?” Parveen swallowed. “This is divine. It’s like heaven.”

The snow-covered peaks glowed softly under the blue sky, and prayer flags fluttered in the wind. The silence wrapped Ananna’s heart in peace and wonder.

“It’s the most beautiful thing I’ve ever seen.” Ananna wiped a tear. “I just love it. I cannot leave. I just cannot leave here.” She continuously wiped tears from her cheeks with her gloved fingers.

The helicopter descended toward Kala Patthar, the legendary viewpoint of Everest. The ground was white, windswept, and shimmering.

They stepped out of the helicopter into biting air. Everything was silent except for the howl of the wind. Parveen shivered.

“Yaar. My eyebrows are freezing, what cold weather it is!”

Ananna laughed. “Worth it though, isn’t it?”

Parveen took photo after photo even though she knew no picture could truly capture the sight. The pilot took their photo and said, “Don’t forget to mention my name in the photo credit, ha-ha-ha.”

Everest towered above them, golden in the sunlight, fierce and calm at the same time.

“If heaven had a doorstep,” Ananna whispered, “I truly believe this is it.”

They stood there, four specks in the vast kingdom of mountains, feeling something shift inside them, some quiet understanding of beauty, courage, and humility.

Much too soon, the pilot reminds them it was time to return to earth, to reality.

The helicopter glided toward the glacier where Everest Base Camp rested like a small island in a sea of white ice. Lots of yellow and orange tents clung stubbornly to the rugged terrain. Climbers moved like tiny dots, preparing for the world's most dangerous climb.

"This is like a dream come true." Parveen stared.

"Look!" Ananna pointed. "The Khumbu Icefall."

The massive frozen waves of ice glistened in the sunlight—beautiful and deadly.

"Climbers will go forward with courage and madness," Parveen said.

Back in the village of Pheriche again, they collected Nasrin and Salehin and flew on.

There it was—the Everest View Hotel, standing proudly among the clouds facing Everest. The helicopter descended toward a terrace overlooking the entire range of the Himalayas.

"I've seen photos of this place but never imagined being here." Nasrin gasped.

"About five years ago, I sent a picture of this place to Ananna," Parveen added, "and captioned it 'Someday we will be there!' Do you remember that, Ananna?"

"Yes," Ananna said. "But I never imagined it would come true."

They entered a balcony to see waiters serving an expensive breakfast menu with plates of food: fluffy pancakes dripping with honey, toasted bread, buttery eggs, crispy hash browns, and steaming coffee.

Salehin took a bite and froze mid-chew.

"Wow! I swear... this pancake is tipping my taste buds forever. This is amazing."

Nasrin laughed. "It's the altitude, not your taste buds."

Ananna raised her mug.

"To all of us. And to dreams that don't stay dreams."

"And to mountains that make you feel small," Parveen added. "Small but loving ... so you can grow bigger inside."

They had a group photo taken as they sat with their breakfast plates arrayed around them, and the backdrop of Everest hiding among the Himalayan peaks behind them. They ate slowly, savouring each bite, each moment, each breathtaking view outside the window.

Everest watched them calmly, as if approving their joy and saying bye-bye.

On the flight back to Lukla, the ambience was so peaceful. The friends sat in reflective silence, realizing the beauty of mountain. Salehin broke the silence.

"So... who wants to climb Everest next year?"

The pilot chuckled. "Climbing is a different story. Much harder than flying."

"But seeing it from helicopter is fine," Parveen said.

"We touched sky and saw the heaven today," Nasrin said softly.

All four, along with the pilot, burst into laughter.

As Lukla came into view, the friends looked at each other, faces wind-kissed, eyes glowing, hearts transformed. The helicopter touched down. The adventure had ended. But something inside them had begun. Salehin stretched.

“Guys. . . this was not a trip, it was an experience.”

Ananna nodded. “A story we’ll tell forever, to so many people in our life.”

“Correction.” Parveen slung an arm over their shoulders. “It’s a story I’ll tell every stranger on earth.”

The four friends walked away from the helicopter changed, inspired, and forever bound by the memory of flying to the top of the world.



A Bittersweet Journey

By Rumaisa Khan



One Friday evening, Rumi was enjoying her cup of chai in the TV lounge. Her four-year-old daughter Fati sat on the couch near her, munching on some biscuits in the hot and humid Karachi dusk. Her husband Raf rushed to the room.

“Yay!” he yelled. “We got it! Finally!”

“What?” Rumi sat up straighter and set down her cup.

“We got selected to immigrate to Canada!”

Fati, their four-year-old daughter, dropped her biscuit and jumped up in excitement.

“You are very close to fulfilling your dream.” Rumi smiled even as her stomach clenched in sudden fear. It was all happening too quickly for her to process. She had always dreamed of studying and working abroad and making her parents proud, but the thought of moving away from all her family caused conflicting emotions to almost overwhelm her.

“I can’t believe that it took two years for them to select us,” Raf went on, not noticing Rumi’s reaction. “Now we need to submit our passports. Where are they?” Raf ran off to find their passports.

“They’re in the dresser drawer,” Rumi called after him.

“I hope they’re not expired,” he said from the bedroom. “Renewing them would take more time.”

At the dinner table, Raf shared the good news with his parents and brother, and they exchanged wide tear-filled smiles. Rumi's mother-in-law caught her eye with a look of mixed relief, excitement, and uncertainty because of the life-altering nature of this news.

"*Abu*," Fati asked. "Are we going somewhere?"

"Oh, yes," Raf said as he leaned over and kissed Fati on the head. "We will travel soon, *Insha'Allah*."

After dinner, Rumi led Fati to her bedroom. Once Fati was asleep, Rumi sat silently on her prayer mat, asking God for guidance on making everything go well for her family as they took this step. Rumi had studied psychology and worked for two years before taking a break to look after their daughter.

That night as they got ready for bed, Rumi turned to Raf.

"Are you sure we are doing the right thing? I'm nervous about the huge cultural differences we'll face in Canada. Plus, Fati is going to miss playing with her friends."

"I value your perspective." He took her hand and sat beside her. "I'm aware of these fears, but we all need a fresh start. You know how difficult things have become here. Since I'm the only one earning a wage, I'm so stressed and tired all the time. I haven't had a single raise during the last two years, despite working so much overtime. If we want to build a better future for ourselves and Fati, we have to make sacrifices and be patient."

Even though they both consciously made the decision to move two years ago, it was especially hard for Rumi, bearing the weight of being her parents' only child. She knew that she would be affected most as the whole change would bring a unique set of challenges for her. She would not only be miles apart from her parents' love and affection herself, but also prevent Fati, their granddaughter, from building a tender connection with her grandparents.

From her husband's perspective, this was an opportunity to get away from the problems of economic instability, inflation, and poor education and healthcare that existed in Pakistan. He was clearly relieved about the choice. Rumi wanted to be supportive, so she kept her feelings to herself.

The next day, Rumi told her parents she would be moving to Canada in a couple of months.

"*Ammi*! I'm going to miss you and *Abu*," Rumi said, her eyes moist with tears. "And this place where I spent half of my life. I'm scared and afraid that something will happen to both of you."

"Oh, my dear daughter!" Rumi's mother hugged her close. "Remember, you are an amazing wife and homemaker, but you should not give up on your goals. This step will not only transform you, but will also bring excitement and a new perspective to your lives. Don't worry about us, we both can take care of each other very well."

"I'm so glad," her father said. "This is such a great accomplishment for both of you. I would like you to feel more grateful. It's a change that will lead to progress and growth for your family."

"That sounds... empowering," Rumi said. "But I'm worried about Fati. She

will feel quite isolated and miss her playmates and family.”

“Children tend to adapt very quickly,” he said. “She’ll make friends in no time.”

A few months later, their luggage bags, already filled with winter clothes, shoes, valuables, candies, kitchen essentials, and personal items, had been weighed, locked, and loaded in the trunk of the car. The entire family reached the airport on time to bid an affectionate farewell to Rumi, her husband, and their little one.

“Until we meet again” Raf said, as he hugged and kissed his parents, brother, nephews and nieces goodbye.

“We are only a video call away,” Rumi’s mother said with teary eyes, pulling her into a tight embrace. “Don’t worry.”

Her father placed his hand on her head and said, “*Fe-Amanullah.*” (Be with the safety of Allah.)

All the members of the family kissed Fati one last time.

“I can’t wait to sit on the window seat with my baby,” Fati chattered, holding her doll.

“Bring a real baby boy when you come next time to Karachi,” Raf’s father chuckled, and everyone laughed. With heavy hearts and hopeful eyes, they all waved goodbye.

As the line began to move, Rumi wrestled with the gravity of her choice, holding her husband’s hand. The bittersweet pain of saying goodbye to her loved ones and homeland almost overcame her desire to embrace the promise of her future.

This transition will give us all a better life and a chance to grow, she told herself. After all, life is a journey of accepting challenges and learning to give up something valuable to achieve your purpose or goals.



Freedom in Her Eyes

By Sugandha



I come from a small city in India, a city on the Ganges riverside, with ancient buildings standing beside bustling markets. The city is filled with life. You wake up to the call of vegetable vendors and sweet smells from mithai¹ shops drifting through the entire street, where elders used to say a girl's classroom is her kitchen, and boys were allowed to rush to schools with backpacks hanging from their shoulders, giggling with their friends, with a sense of freedom in their eyes, which was a dream for many girls around, like me.

However, on one of the not-so-regular Sunday mornings, it was Results Day. Yes, I was given the basic right of education. My parents fought for me and against societal norms and all odds. They gave me the best education they could afford. That day, my brother JJ, Ma, and my father were all sitting in front of the computer with me. Unlike today's ultra-fast computers, it was a grey box with thick monitors that curved outward like little TV screens.

"Are you excited, Akansha?" my father asked, holding my hand tightly.

I could only nod. I felt like an alarm clock was ringing inside my chest: my heart pounding, my palms sweaty. My parents may have been thinking that I was doing fine, but from the inside, it was like I was trying to hide a storm. Everything raced inside my mind—events from the past, instances when my relatives kept poking my parents about whether a girl child should be allowed to get a higher education and questioning their decision.

The clock struck 10, fans hummed endlessly, and with trembling fingers

1 Traditional sweets from India and Pakistan.

I entered the roll numbers on an old '90s keyboard. The screen glowed and showed reloading signs as students across the country were waiting for this day. The internet started showing its colours, and my heartbeat increased. With every breath, I was thinking, what if I fail to become what my parents fought our entire society for?

They stood against regressive beliefs, handled insults, and raised me with the hope that I would prove everyone wrong. And now, their courage felt like a weight, as if someone had placed a heavy rock on my chest. I couldn't bear to think I might disappoint them. Then the time had come: my result was on the screen.

It was a perfect score!

For a moment, I could not process it. After studying hard till late at night, after every prayer, my parents' fight suddenly started to feel like it had some meaning. It was not just a random number on a screen. It was the key to my freedom. It gave me access to my dream university. For the first time in life, I had made it.

My father was standing beside me, my pillar of strength. He didn't say much, but the slight curve of his mouth, the sparkle in eyes, and his firm warm hands on my shoulders expressed everything he was not able to put in words about the battles he had fought for his little girl. In that pleased expression and warm touch, I knew I had made him proud.

The day I had imagined for so long had finally arrived. With my folded admission letter, a few new clothes, some necessary documents, and a heart full of nervous excitement, I boarded my first flight with my father by my side. A new city was waiting for this little girl. As the plane lifted off, I watched my old world shrink beneath the clouds and my dreams take flight with me.

Ahead of me awaited new beginnings, new dreams, and a life I was finally brave enough to chase. All the while, my Dad held my hand. His face shone with joy when he talked about me. He never lost hope, showcasing his belief in me.

These thoughts crowded my mind. 10-year-old me will always be grateful to her parents, who never let the societal pressure tear their kid's dream or break her wings.

Finally, it was time for the flight to land. The city lights appeared below me like scattered stars, somewhere between the clouds and the unfamiliar buildings. I found a new version of myself, one that had survived, dared, and broken the stereotype. I was no longer the girl who watched the street from a window. I had become the girl who was ready to claim her dreams and never give up.

Rendezvous With Myself

By Munit Vikram



Beep... beep... beep...

A feeble sound broke my peaceful sleep. After a few seconds, my sleepy brain registered the sound: my alarm clock.

It's 5 a.m. already? With my eyes still closed, my hand instinctively reached out to turn off the alarm clock. *Can I sleep a bit more?* My sleepyhead was having a dialogue by itself, a practice I've developed in the last sixty-one years of living by myself.

Oooh! Wait. It's a work day.

Turning over in the bed, barely opening my eyes, I peeped outside the window. *It's snowing. Looks like it will be a cloudy day.* "What difference does it make," I murmured to myself. *Some things have gotta be done, even if you don't like it.*

Stop this lazying around and get off the bed, chided my brain.

I stuck one leg out of the sheet. My toes grazed the ground, fumbling for my slippers. Finally, I stood up, poked my feet into the slippers, and shuffled toward the kitchen for a warm glass of water.

I filled the electric kettle with filtered water and plugged it in. While I was searching for my favourite lavender mug, the phone rang. My eyes snapped towards the phone and the wall clock above the refrigerator: 5:45 a.m. *Who could be calling at this ungodly hour?*

"Hello, Del?"

"Mom?" I said, surprised. "Is everything alright?"

“Oh, yes, sorry to startle you,” she said, sensing my worry. “I didn’t mean to call you so early. But this is the only time I can speak to you without you being distracted by work.”

I could see my eyes rolling up in the mirror across the room, which instantly brought a smile to my lips. *Mom knows me so well.*

“Okay, Mom, I’m listening. Just wasn’t expecting your call. The last few weeks have been super busy as we are approaching year end—”

“Your dad and I have decided to sell our house,” she broke in. “We are too old to take care of it. It’s too big for us now.”

“What? When?” I was not expecting this, even remotely. “I thought you were in Mexico for the winter?”

“We moved everything before we left.”

“Are you even serious?” Even I could hear exasperation in my voice. “You are telling me now?” I took a deep breath. *Stay calm.* “Okay. Where’s my stuff?”

“In your room. You’ll need to make arrangements to pick it up. You only have a week before the listing.”

“Really? Can I call you back? I have to figure everything out.”

After we hung up, I was totally blank. I stood beside the phone for a few seconds. Then I raised my hand, palm out. *Not right now, Del. Go ahead with your routine and park this conversation for later. You have a lot of work to do.*

I walked into the kitchen and the kettle was beeping, indicating the water was boiled. I poured the water into my favourite mug and added a dash of honey with lime. *Ummm, perfect mix.* Honey-lime water has been my first drink of the day since I was teenager. Today, I really needed it. I sat on my favourite cobalt-blue recliner, which has seen better days.

I started to rock gently, but a storm raged in my head. *What’s the need to sell the house? It has so many memories. Our happy place, as we lovingly used to call it.*

Del, you have to stop these wandering thoughts. Didn’t the doctor advise you against it? This kind of stress will drive up your cholesterol even more.

I stood up again and got ready for work. Later that day, I booked a flight to Regina.

Three days to pack and make arrangements for the trip. I have to cheer myself up. Everything is going against my comfort zone.

Walking down Cornwall Street felt like a walk into my past. Pure nostalgia. The crunch of salt and ice under my boots was so familiar and refreshing. Number 1856 was etched in my memory. As I walked towards the entrance, I recalled the number of times I’d run down the driveway barefoot as a kid, or driven up it coming home as a teenager. I opened the door with a click and made my way inside the house.

The familiar scent of shortbread cookies and gingerbread took me back to Christmases past. The comfy couch, the round oak table, the walls where we scribbled with crayons, everything had a story to it. We lived in this house for twenty-five long

years. *I can find my room even with my eyes closed.*

As I took a quick tour of the house, I realized it's exactly the same as in my memory. A few minutes passed. When the nostalgia subsided, I realized the baking smell was not only in my memory; this comes from freshly baked goods. Curiously, I stepped into the pantry.

"Typical Mom," I said out loud, smiling. The shelves held labelled boxes: shortbread cookies, gingerbread, and rum balls. Unconsciously, my hands reached out and took a piece of shortbread. *Ummm. The taste is so fresh, and it's soft too. Mom and Dad must have just left for Mexico.*

With that thought, I unpacked my suitcases to place them in my room. I called up the Copper Kettle and ordered my favourite pizza for dinner. While gorging on the last slice, my eyes started to feel heavy. *Seems like the hot bath and the delicious pizza did its job. I will sleep like a log till late morning.*

Only two more days to go through my stuff. Which to take with me and which to donate to Value Village? Today is about cleaning and organizing and the last day, Saturday, will be about packing my stuff.

In Mom's kitchen, I poured some water in a pot and placed it on the stove. The refrigerator seemed well stocked, but I could not find limes. As I closed the fridge door, I spotted a photo of my old school. It'd been ages since I saw it.

Since I had to go to Safeway to get groceries and other stuff, I decided to visit the school on my way. I parked my vehicle and walked slowly towards the playground. With snow all over the place, it looked different. I made myself go inside to check with reception. I was walking very slow, trying to absorb every detail: my classrooms, the library, the water fountain.

To my left, I saw the staircase where my friend Joyce and I had played "hide and seek" so many times. Two little girls with pigtails, hiding and giggling, with little hands over their mouths. Or later, Little Joyce and myself, holding hands and walking together towards the cafeteria.

Then two boys came running down the stairs together, and one murmured something to the other. It was like a splash of cold water thrown onto my face. Everything was familiar and yet I didn't belong here anymore. I sat on a chair in the corridor. *What is this heaviness? Why do I feel lost and out of place?*

My sacred hiding place has become someone else's spot. A new set of students were making their memories, replacing mine from so long ago. I was shattered. Sitting there, I could see my happiness vanish.

I stood up again and walked toward the door. Graduation photos from every year hung on the walls down the hallway. I spotted our year and stopped. It was easy to see Little Joyce and Little Del standing in the front row, and I couldn't help smiling. It felt like 61 years of wisdom was being imparted to the little me who embarked on this journey called life, and it was time to give her an update.

Little Del, I thought. Enjoy the moment. Seize the moment because everything is in that moment. When time moves on, and you grow up or move out of that place, nothing will ever be the same.

You will never have the same feelings or be that happy again. Tomorrow it will be someone else's special place, so enjoy the time you are there, revel in the moment, as it will never come back.

I felt a vacuum inside me lift, and I made a promise to both of us, to live in the moment. With that thought, I headed to Safeway for groceries.

Safeway looked busier than it had in the past. I wanted to wrap up the grocery shopping fast so I could begin packing. I quickly tossed a few items from my list into my shopping cart and stood in the cashier line.

“Oh my God, my wallet!” Did I forget it in the car or leave it at home? I looked over and saw four people ahead of me in the queue. While staring at them, a vivid image flashed in front of my eyes. Fifty years ago, Mom had asked me to get milk and bread from a nearby store and I forgot the money at home. I could still feel the panic of being too embarrassed to even tell anyone I had no money. I could literally see my younger self sweating and crying and finally creeping to the exit.

Today, I was angry at myself, but I calmed down. *What are your options, Del? Solution, solution. Think hard.*

Bam. The answer came to me quickly. *I can pay through my phone. Or I can tell the cashier to hold onto my grocery cart, and I'll go get the money. Voilà.*

Just as I had with Little Del, I wanted to console my younger self: *Don't be scared. These things happen. Not just once. You don't have to focus on the problem. Just look for a solution calmly. You will fail multiple times in life. You can never be so prepared that you can avoid making mistakes, so instead of over-preparing for failure, learn to find alternatives. Dear Del, life is super hard and will test you at your lowest. All you need is the resilience to keep going and make a path for yourself.*

I hugged my younger self tightly and felt Little Del calming down.

“Ma'am, are you in the queue?” a man said from behind me. I snapped back into the present.

“I'm sorry, I'm sorry,” I said, and placed my items on the counter.

While driving back home with the groceries, I spotted Tim Hortons on Broad Street, and pulled in for a coffee as I have hundreds of times in the last few decades. I went inside, ordered my usual medium-black light-roast coffee with a blueberry muffin and a wrap. *It's been a high octane morning so far,* I thought, while sipping my coffee.

As I checked through my phone messages and emails, I overheard a family seated behind me. The dad was scolding his son for bad grades, and the boy was whining. Father and son were so engrossed in that heated conversation that they forgot where they were.

A waiter leaned towards them and spoke quietly, “Please lower your voices.”

I started to take a bite of my blueberry muffin but my thoughts drifted to a conversation my father and I had years ago on the porch of my house. My father was adamant that I opt for computer programming, but I wanted to do business management. I could still feel the heat of the conversation. It was rare that my dad was that angry at me. He was literally yelling and calling me names. I could see the whole scenario right in front of my eyes.

“It’s your life, destroy it as you please.” Dad tossed his coffee mug onto the ground. “But never come back.” He stalked away, and my younger self picked up the mug and placed it on the porch table. Then I headed towards the garden swing, crying profusely.

“No one cares about what I want. Dad doesn’t love me or care about me. He is only bothered about his reputation.” I was so mad I wanted to run away from the house.

Back in the present, I sat there with the last bit of wrap and watched that crying girl from forty years ago. I felt sad for her, but I had to tell her why she was wrong. I spoke to her in my mind:

Young Del, don’t cry. You don’t know what will happen with the choices that you make today. You wanted to pursue business management, and against your dad’s wishes, you went ahead with it. I know you worked hard to get a degree, but then the recession happened, and job placements were tough. At the same time, computers boomed and computer programming was the next big thing. Any and every average person with computer programming got a job, but you had to start in the mailroom.

You took five years to get ahead, and you still had to get more education. It was a longer and more painful route that you could have avoided. I know that you couldn’t sense the future, but dear, that’s where experience comes into the picture. Dad was not mad at you. Rather, he loved you enough to try to change your mind. He could see the recession coming and wanted a smooth career ride for his little daughter. I can tell you how it all finally panned out. I lost a lot of time chasing my dreams after making the wrong choice.

As I said that, I realized today was actually a rendezvous with myself. I shared my life experience with that young girl, who was oblivious to how her choices affected her future. It was also a learning experience for me in the present. *Everything is transient and so is our journey called life. What matters is the moment, which is bound by time. If the moment passes, it can’t return.*

“From now on, I will cherish every moment,” I whispered, making a promise to myself. I picked up my car keys in one hand and my coffee in the other, heading towards the car to drive home.

When I got to the driveway of my parents’ house, I saw my sister holding her bags at the front door. I rushed towards her with a new version of myself, a new me, metamorphosed in one day.

A Perfect Cup of Tea in a Foreign Land

By Tehreem Tabbasum Iqbal



Making milk tea was not her specialty. Tehreem was always more comfortable with dishwashing than cooking. But after her divorce, she felt a strong urge to make a cup of delicious tea for her mother. She had only realized the importance of serving her mother during her marriage. Now, that feeling had converted into the desire to make a good cup of green tea for herself, which she was practicing religiously while she enjoyed watching Regina's living sky through her window.

On this Friday afternoon, in the cold weather, with the golden sunshine making the fresh snow glitter like diamond dust, she held on to the warmth of her freshly brewed green tea. As she was staring out the window, her mind suddenly shifted back home to Pakistan, sitting on the gray one-seater sofa with the small brown table between her and her mother. Her mother was sitting on her bed, drinking milk tea from a steaming cup that Tehreem had prepared. Tehreem leaned forward to dip her chocolate biscuit in her mother's tea.

"Don't dip in my teacup," her mother scolded. "You will ruin its taste."

Tehreem made a funny face, sticking her tongue out with mischief and eating the whole biscuit in one big bite, her cheeks puffed out like a chipmunk. Then, in a teasing tone, Tehreem said, "But Momma.... I am leaving in one month. You should indulge your favorite daughter."

"I love all of my children the same." Momma smiled.

Tehreem gave a hum and went back to enjoy her biscuits. After a bit of comfortable silence, Momma spoke again.

"The path you have chosen to walk will be a tough and lonely one. I hope you know that, and you have prepared yourself for that. I won't be there for you in Canada."

She paused, then looked up to see into her mother's beautiful brown eyes; they held concern and apprehension for her. Tehreem had not seen this look in her mother's eyes since before her divorce. She thought for a moment, then replied.

“Yes, Momma, I am aware. But I must take this journey alone, no matter how tough it is, so that I can rediscover myself.”

Her momma nodded, she didn't have to explain herself further. Momma was the strongest advocate for Tehreem going abroad. Her mother had already witnessed Tehreem losing herself in that sham of a marriage. Tehreem was her momma's eldest daughter, her pride. The bond between mothers and eldest daughters is like best friends. Momma had discovered herself when Tehreem was born. Maybe this was the reason why Momma could not forgive Tehreem's ex-husband and ex-in-laws. They had snatched her best friend away from her.

Canada was far away from all of Tehreem's family, and her loved ones. Her grandmother used to talk about “that place beyond the seven seas,” and Canada was that place. In Canada, Tehreem knew she would not have the safety of her family, nor would she be able to let her guard down. But it was also far away from the painful memories of her not-so-distant past. Here she would be able to rediscover herself, explore new places, and experience a whole new world of possibilities.

Suddenly, Tehreem's phone started to ring, and she was once again back in Regina, looking at the mesmerizing view outside. She recognized the ringtone; it was her momma's. Odd, it was eleven in the morning here, so it must be nighttime in Pakistan. Why was Momma up?

“Salam, Momma, what happened?”

“Oh, nothing much. I just remembered I want to ask you about your youngest sister. She was talking about doing a master's from Islamabad. Do you think it is a good idea?”

And there it was. Instantly, the warmth from the cup had travelled to her heart, making it light and bright. The biggest fear when she was coming to Canada was that she would not be able to be involved in her siblings' lives anymore, as though the physical distance would create distance in their bonds as well. But Momma didn't let that happen. Momma was the glue that was holding their entire family together. Momma was always creating space for Tehreem to be involved in the family matters, no matter how small they were, even if she was far away in Canada.

After the phone call, in which she promised that she would give her sister a call to talk about her options for the best university, Tehreem realized that her fear of completely losing her previous identity and her loved ones was unfounded. She did not leave all of herself behind when she moved to Canada; rather, she was now carrying parts of her family within herself. Like the desire to drink a good cup of tea. Tehreem prefers green tea instead of milk tea, unlike her Momma and siblings. It was like she was linking herself with her family through this cup of tea, even while she was finding herself in this beautiful new place.

Looking down at the now-empty cup, she smiled to herself and said, “It doesn't seem that lonely.”

And maybe it wasn't. All thanks to her Momma, who made sure that her best friend would not be lonely, even so far away.

CONTRIBUTORS' BIOGRAPHIES



Mukta Jahan Banu is an experienced psychologist from Bangladesh, with more than fourteen years of practical experience in the field of mental health. She has received various international training in Nepal, India, France and Japan with a focus on mental health, humanitarian response and community support. She has worked extensively with marginalized and vulnerable populations and communities, utilizing her deep empathetic and trauma-informed approach. She also has written various interesting publications on migration and addiction, especially her MPhil thesis, which explored the lived experience of women with drug addiction problems and challenging societal discrimination. Being a passionate writer, advocate and community well-being supporter, Mukta continues to champion mental health with dedication.



Isabel Carvajal was born in Medellín, Colombia, South America. She arrived in Canada, her new home, in the winter of 2021 and moved to the Regina prairies in 2022. She is a creative and passionate nature lover. She holds a degree in education and art. Passionate about books and writing, her poetry has been published in various magazines and anthologies in her country. She has also illustrated the covers of some books and magazines, as she is also a visual artist. She has worked as an art tutor with children, as an art therapist, and in Canada, she has worked in childcare. Most recently, she had the opportunity to contribute to the book “Hispanic Canadian Art and Literature” with her poetry and paintings at the Ibero-American Book Fair in Canada.



Tehreem Tabbasum Iqbal is a psychologist who worked in the field of training & development for over 5 years. Passionate & determined, Tehreem seeks freedom from the limiting expectations of patriarchal society. Her zeal for studying human behavior—especially workplace dynamics, decision-making & perception— is motivated by the meaningful conversations she had with her mother. Thoughtful & creative, she is known for her steadfast loyalty for her loved ones. She moved to Regina hoping to grow personally & build a meaningful future. Every night she enjoys the company of a good book with a cup of green tea & chocolate biscuits.



Rumaisa Khan was born in Karachi, Pakistan and has resided in Regina, SK since February 2024. She holds a Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery from Dow Medical College, Karachi. As a compassionate doctor back home, she is driven by a deep ambition to practice medicine in her new country. Her hobbies include cooking, painting, travelling, writing, photography, volunteering and meeting new people. She finds ultimate comfort and satisfaction when she is around her husband and her adorable daughter, Ruqayyah.



Hasina Nasrin is a warm-hearted and hardworking Bangladeshi woman whose life is deeply centered around her family. She is known for her nurturing nature and her unwavering commitment to ensuring her loved ones feel safe, supported, and truly happy. Her home is filled with care, positivity, and stability—reflecting the values she lives by every day. Hasina is a passionate banker with over twenty years of experience. She enjoys traveling, exploring nature, and meeting new people. Hasina’s love for the world adds colour and excitement to her life and inspires her family to embrace new experiences. Above all, Hasina enriches the lives of everyone around her.



Sugandha loves figuring out how things work. She comes from a science background with an interest in innovation and creativity. Sugandha likes researching new projects, and when she’s not nerding out over something new, you’ll probably find her trying to cook new recipes from different cultures or saying yes to exploring somewhere new, like being in nature or sitting at the riverside. Sugandha is a fun-loving person who loves meeting new people, laughs often, radiates positivity, and is a great friend. Emotional strength is her superpower and curiosity is her anchor. Sugandha is always growing, always discovering, and always ready for the next adventure, be it big or small.



Munit Vikram was born in Allahabad, a vibrant city in Uttar Pradesh, India. She currently resides in Regina, Canada and loves the quietness and calmness of the place. She has master’s degrees in human resources and psychology with huge experience in Human Resources. She has an innate interest in human behavior which motivated her to write her first book “Embrace Yourself” about human behavior within the corporate world. This is her third time contributing a short story for the “Opening Doors Through Stories” chapbook series, with work appearing in “ODTS: Home” and “ODTS: Community”. In addition to writing, she enjoys baking and crocheting.



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