

Extended Family



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Mothers, fathers, wives, girlfriends, they are all family. Without all of them you would be someone else, but here you are. Be happy with your stories, they change you after they arrange you. Your family makes you and sometimes breaks you.

Kim Taylor, October 2020

A Riverboat Pilot

The snow blew so hard
across the road
that my mother had me
roll down the window
and watch for the side

I felt a little like a riverboat pilot
"Mark Twain!"
My left ear
didn't feel anything at all
after 30 seconds

~~



Coming Out

Watching a news feature,
A wife who changed
after some incident
(we came in late)
and was now a lesbian

Dear, I said
I think I'm gay
Mmm she replied

~~

Streaming

Tinnitus roaring
louder than a jet
and yet
not loud enough
to drown out
a horrible radio commercial

Time, I guess
to plug in the phone

~~

Done With You

Notebook slides
off the top of my bag
as if hiding
Almost finished
Almost time to be thrown
on the pile with the others
and forgotten

~~

Your Left Ear

The delicate shape of your lips
the curve of your nose
The smell of the skin
behind your left ear

~~



Not Horny

No I'm fine she said
I'm not horny
I must have pouted
Oh, you want to treat me?
She stood before me
as I ran my fingers lightly
over her breasts
and down her stomach
She closed her eyes
shivered
and opened her legs

Later, in the shower
she said no, it's fine
I'm not horny
as I reached for her
~~

One Day At A Time

I try
I really try
to slow my life
to spend a day reading
some sci fi book
or to watch
a popular movie
It works for a while
but the pressure to create
builds up

One day at a time

~~

Her Guardian

She walks past me
one of the last warm days
She is wearing sweats
a bra (bare back otherwise)
and her jacket tied
around her waist

Sipping a drink
she crosses the boulevard
And I take off my glasses
to watch her intently
willing her safe passage

~~

Hey Google

Hey Google
I say
and check a spelling
My phone answers
and after that
my tablet tells me
that she has no connection

Even my machines
talk at cross purposes

~~

School Of:

The Group of Seven
Painters Eleven
The Photosuccession

I often thought
I'd like to be part
of some creative group
But how long
are they around?
How many are still here?

And I forget
that my martial art schools
are still here
going on 400 years.

~~

What Your Great-Gran Wants

The dead don't bother us
They rest silent
in their graves

If we hear whispers
from the past
it's from our own heads
they come

Even the books
our ancestors wrote
are simply best guesses
of what they would say to us

Therefore don't presume
upon the dead
let them rest
Instead work it out yourself
as the dead
worked it out
for themselves

~~

Gyodo Wins by Ashi Otoshi

Here she comes
dropping from one step
to another
like water down
a fish ladder

Time to get up
and make lunch
We'll watch Sumo
Like whales
going down that fish ladder
Thud, thud, thud

~~

Blue Capri

She drove a Mercury Capri
I never drove it
we were never that close
But I loved her
and I loved her car
Slept in both
if you want to know

I never told her
about me and her car
~~

Dry Now

What possessed me
I could never say
But driving my father's Pontiac
Seeing the puddle
Seeing my friends
It was like
the wheel wrenched itself
toward the curb
Fifty years
I've felt guilty about that
~~



It Takes a Village

What does it mean
to come from a village
a place where that woman's mother
knew your grandmother
A place where you don't seek connection
but dis-connection

I come from villages
crossroads and small towns
My small city
was never a lonely place
it was an empty field
and I could plant
whatever I wished

~~

Ode to a Paperclip

As a hook
to pull wax from my ear
As a chain link
to fix a toilet
A fish hook
A reamer
And an Awl

As a daisy chain
for a bored kid to make
waiting for his mother
to finish work
(I was tasked to take it apart)

As a keychain
A screwdriver
A zipper pull
And a button
All these and more
Oh, yes
and to clip papers
~~

The Mending

The old men sat
on old chairs
beside reels of net
pulling it down
and spreading it
before letting it drop
into a box

Slowly
the reel would stop
and the old men
on old chairs
would pick up a shuttle
and twine
to fix a hole

In and through and around
with the shuttle, the twine
wrapped inside
Then a knot
and the hand-made knife
would cut the twine

~~

Kan and Ken

It was quite a challenge
I had to know she was upset
(nothing is wrong!)
I had to know why she was upset
(I don't know why, I'm not, Nothing)
and how to fix it
(What's that, why did you do that)

I did my best
and the practice in mind-reading
made me a better swordsman
But Oh Lord it was exhausting
~~

Dear 'Liza

She was
The Hole in the Bucket song
and I was the guy
that ended up doing
what had to be done
~~

Home On Edinburgh

One tree
a massive oak
towering over all else
has changed colour
Brilliant red
amongst the greens
of lesser trees

It truly looks
like a torch
set down here
on a quiet lawn
beside a busy street
~~

You Were In The Right

You stood
and watched me make
a bowl of vegetables
while you ate an ice cream bar

Earlier
you had said you don't
get enough vegetables
at lunch, that you need them
at dinner too,
that you had no vegetables
all day

I offered to make you some
and you said no
So when I offered you
a bowl of vegetables
you were in the right
to refuse them
to watch me throw them
in the garbage

You were in the right
and I was in the wrong
This is important to know
~~

You Never Listen To Me

It is uncharitable of me
petty, impatient, unkind
To be sick to death
of complaints from those
with nothing to complain about

Are you unhappy
Why?
Fix it

Oh, you just want me to hear you?

Tell someone else
What would make you think
that I want to hear
your bitching
about nothing

Tell someone else
and leave me alone
I have my own problems
Problems I am working on
I don't need your problems
along with your insistence
you don't want my help
Just my ear

Find another ear
Don't park your unhappiness
in my head
~~



But You Didn't Finish Yours

At a restaurant
you would drink your water
and when you were done
you would drink
what was left of mine

The water I had saved
for the end of my meal
I don't think
I ever told you
how much that annoyed me

~~

Heading For The Ditch

I don't remember
what we argued about
but I do remember
that I would take my hands
from the steering wheel
and drop them into my lap

You never once
reached for that wheel

~~

My Father Died

My father died
in the early '50s
in the Korean War
He was hit by a shell
while sitting on his tank

It took quite a long time
to die of his injuries
around 30 years
and many thousands
of bottles of rum

~~

Out Of The Bush

She would walk
out of the bush
and into my cabin
Never saying a word

She would head for the shower
grab the razor
I kept for her
and shave her arms and legs
wash herself twice
and then, naked
she would take my hand
and walk me into the bedroom

Later I would cook for her
while she read, feet tucked up
in the overstuffed chair
wearing one of my shirts

Sometimes when I cooked
I would think
“too much in the pan”
then look at that chair
She was that quiet

I never knew
how long she would stay
One day
she would pick up her pack
and walk out the door

~~

I'm From Guelph

“She was
arguably
Puerto Rico's greatest poet”

I'm from Guelph
and don't have to worry
about that sort of thing

~~



My Poetry Office

I sit in a borrowed car
terrified of spilling my coffee
trying to hook my phone
into the system
and failing

I don't know how this thing works
but somehow
I get the CD playing
something instrumental
No voices to distract me

If only I had something
to say
~~

I Am Bozo

When I was a kid
we had Bozo Dolls
a blow up toy
you could punch
and it would rock
upright again

This was long years
before I had heard
of Daruma

My Bozo Doll
is upright
in a generally positive
frame of mind
Sure it wavers
as it is hit
and it can rock back
into the manic from depression
But I know
that if I wait
it will rock back
to the centre
~~

In Every War

In every war
there are times
when men sit and wait
bored
between the killing

My father was on his tank
on a hill
the 50 calibre gun
set to single fire
And the Chinese sniper
was down the hill
behind rocks

For an afternoon
my father
and the sniper
traded shots
For their amusement
For the amusement
of the bored young men
on both sides
waiting for the killing
to start again

~~

"ARE THEY ALL MINE?"

JAN 58



My Father Lied About His Age

My father lied about his age
and joined the army
to fight in Korea
He was not a patriot
He was not fighting communism
He was a kid
from a fishing village
with a distant father
and a strong mother
He was bored

Perhaps he thought his father
(wounded at Normandy)
would be proud of him
But he never told me so

~~

Thump

Thump, thump, thump
the back of my head
would hit the kitchen wall
each time my grandmother
would chuck me under the chin
accusing me of some deed
I did not do

Thump, thump, thump
and each time
stars would explode
but I would not speak
and I would not cry
and my eyes
on her eyes
said "no
it was not me"

~~

Dutchman's Pants

My gran always said
it wouldn't rain
if there was enough blue
to make a Dutchman's pants

This late September sky
can't seem to decide
how old that Dutchman is
Black clouds rolling in and out
faster than the line
for coffee at Starbucks

~~

A Black Kid

In 1981
Gwendolyn Brooks
wrote a poem
about a black kid
who died in her back alley
running away from a cop
I just read it
1981, 1881, 2021
Black kids running
Black kids not running
Black kids dying
~~

Blood Work

Rushing through my Grande
(god I hate these frou frou names)
Because the soccer mom in a van
ahead of me
ordered a frou frou drink
and they got it wrong

Rushing through my Grande
because I have an appointment
for blood-work at the hospital
which I would have missed
had I not taken Pam
some sliced apple

~~

Reading Glasses

As I cleaned my Old Man's reading glasses
I thought "how can he see through these"
I thought "how do you not notice how dirty these are"
And I am writing this
thinking "my glasses are filthy"
I really should clean them

~~

Two Month Spans

My life is lived
in two month spans
from blood test
to blood test
and now, once again
I wait for test results
in Ambulatory Care
Wondering if the numbers
will tell me I'm good
for another two months
(yes)

~~

Just Tell Me

Just tell me
this is normal
These testicles that hurt
(normal, as they shrink)
These cheekbones that itch
the ankles that swell
(too much sugar)
the base of my neck (itch again)
the back that spasms
(you broke your neck... I what?)
The aches and pains
ignored at 25
become important
at 65 and stage 4

Every twinge looms
so just tell me
this is normal
Just tell me
it doesn't mean something
~~

Past Pleasures

Do you think
about the electric jolt
of an orgasm
from so many years ago

Do you wonder
if it was me
or someone else?

~~



There Was Frost

There was frost
on the ground
the very last time
she left my bed

I looked out the window
and counted her footsteps
for as far as I could
Not knowing
I would never again count them
coming the other way

~~

Happy Birthday

When is your birthday
the nurse asked him
1977

And I thought
was that the year
I worked in a factory
in St. Thomas
after too many years
in school

Or had I gone back
to find the love of my life
had moved on

~~

Hyphon-Canadian

Where do you come from
these second generation kids,
these hyphenations, would say
From here
I would say
No, where did your family come from
From Here

It took me years
to understand
that hyphen meant rootless
meant ungrounded, unbelonging
Neither here nor there
These kids didn't know
where they were

Their parents, straddling the Atlantic
One foot in Canada
one in the old country
and their kids
dangling from their back pocket
not knowing which leg
was theirs

~~

Six Generations

Six generations
of my name
from the same village
You would think
that we'd own the place
And I suppose
over six generations
we've owned a goodly chunk

But none of it stuck
And now we live in cities
that were so far away
by horse

The distance now,
with fast cars
and good roads,
is emotional

~~

A Few Drops

There are a few hints of rain
the drops collect on the windscreen
defeating time
I might miss one spot
but I see now
there are perhaps a hundred
Does it really mean rain

You were like this
a hint here
one there
never enough together
for me to be sure you wanted me

Looking back now
defeating time
with memory
I suspect
you would have slept with me
~~

Self Discipline

Oh my lord
I just realized
I don't allow myself
to take the first sip
of my coffee
until I've written a poem

That self discipline
that had me running the halls
of my High School
each winter day, willing or not
is still whispering in my ear
"put on your runners"

~~

The Side Streets of Santiago

We walked down the side streets
of Santiago
Past the students
moving in and out of bars
Past the outdoor lights
over the first patios of summer
We walked and watched
and listened as waves of Chilean Spanish
washed over us
Searching for a restaurant
where we could get a beer
and a sandwich
Nothing special
as we walked in the warm
evening air
down the side streets
of Santiago
~~

Orange Shirt Day

The next shirt in the pile
was orange
so I put it on
and then learned
it is Orange Shirt Day
If I had known
I would have looked for this shirt
First I've heard of Orange Shirt Day

Orange to me
was the Orange Hall
and tap dancing lessons
it was the LOL before that was funny
It was Ontario, when you were an Orangeman
if you wanted to work in this town
It was the Catholic School (not Orange)
up the street
where one of their kids
knocked me off my bike
because I didn't stop
at the crosswalk he was guarding

But today is Orange Shirt Day
and the Orangemen grow old
their halls grow dingy
or are sold for condos
The echoes of smug prejudice
fading hopefully into the past

~~

The Big Eight

Fifty Thousand Watts
of AM power
Straight south from Windsor
through Detroit
and half way to Mexico
CKLW The Big Eight
was my radio station

I was a white kid amongst white kids
in Southwest Ontario
And my music was Motown
my comfort food
R&B, Soul and the Funk Brothers horn section
was the sound track of my childhood

Now CKLW is talk radio
whatever that is
But Motown is gone
my childhood is gone
Both bled dry
for whatever there was
that was fresh and new

~~

The First Flat

When I wanted to escape
I would drop down
to the first flat
behind the house
and drop down
into the Phlox
disappearing into that mildewed
world of leafless stalks
topped with a layer of colour
sitting there on the clinkers
the ashes of ancient coal fires
until my cares dropped away

~~



The Magical World

Boats and beaches
Gullies and creeks
Fields and flowers
My childhood was magical
hours spent, nose in the grass
watching strange creatures
Somersaults into my brother's nose
(and didn't I catch shit for that)
Kicked out the door
and told to come back for dinner
if I wanted it
Endless days
left to myself
left to confront the world
on my own

~~

Holes in my Resume

Sixty four years old
and I've never been
in a mental institution
never been in detox
Just what makes me think
I can be a poet?
Is there time yet?

~~

In The Terrible Gown

In the terrible gown
I pad in sock feet
into the first room
for the needle to be placed
into my arm
"did you drink your shake?"
Yes I say

and pad into the second room
where I am laid on a slab
and told to follow directions
"and don't move"

Breathe in
Hold
And breathe
over and over
"That wasn't so bad
now we'll give you some dye
this may feel cold"

Breathe in
Hold
And breathe
"all done" they say
Is everything in there?
"oh we're not allowed to say
you wait five minutes and then you can go"

Everything was there
but with holes

~~

He Was Upset

It was 7:30 in the evening
when my doctor called
(I remember house calls
but those were a long time ago)
"You have cancer" he said

He was upset
and I told him it was fine
and I told him it was a good run
and I told him I understood
and I told him it was fine

~~

BOGO

My thoughts move
from death to life to death again
And what can I learn from that
as I watch my thoughts

What else can I learn
but death and life are the same
Each contained in the other
Each requiring the other
like a BOGO sale
Buy one, Get one free

~~



Sleepy Bunny

Sleepy bunny
I lift the blanket
place a cold hand
on a warm tummy
and am rewarded
by a tiny squeal

That will keep me going
for the rest of the day

~~

My Own Gormenghast

I woke at 4am
dreaming of the house
This time I was downstairs
and looking in the basement
for the light switch
to show me the woodshop
with its machinery
and its piles of wood
but the light switch
didn't work
And I slept no more
~~

Trying Again

Trying again
to describe the feeling
of the sight
of your face each day
The failure of language
~~

Three Strip Joints

There was a circuit once
in this town
three strip joints
one with a dinner buffet

You would start with the first show
downtown
then to the edge of town
for roast beef and a beer
and a show

Then skirting the edge
to another show

Downtown for a fourth show
and finally to the last show
the last beer
and the ride back to school

~~

A Small Moment of Panic

I wake to a small moment of panic
as I realize you're not beside me
But I hear the tap running
and I pretend to be asleep
as you get back under the covers

It's important to be cool
in these first few nights together
I mumble a bit
turn over
and put my arms around you
as my heart slows
and I drift back to sleep
~~

We Fight It

We fight it
this drift toward winter
Shorts with a jacket
on a bicycle
The lightest sweater
we can get away with
Tight leggings
and a tight jumper
with a scarf to break up
the wind

~~

Things Change

In high school
she was pretty butch
Short hair
and a string of girlfriends
Last I heard
she was living in the country
with a baby and a man
Things change

~~

The Way You Walk

The way you walk
hips swaying
shoulders swinging
like Mifune

I'm tempted
to call you back
just to watch you
go up the stairs again

~~

I Caught a Glimpse

In an age of long skirts
the ankle is sexy
Today
as she got out of her car
I caught a glimpse
of the side of her mouth
before she put on her mask

And her nose
I am a collector of noses
and that was a good one

~~

Papa Science

Whatever happened
to acid rain
and the ozone layer?
Did they convince us
that science
would fix it?

Science the dutiful father
who fixes what we break
even as we tell him
he, his friends, and all he knows
is wrong
Still, he fixes the leak in the roof
~~

If Only I'd Met Her

If only I'd met
someone like her
when I was young
he thinks

But he's wrong
he met her
every year of his life
It wasn't until now
that he could see her

~~

At Twenty

At twenty

I looked for a goddess

At forty

a partner

And at sixty

I'm looking for a nurse

~~

At 4am

At 4am
I never know
if I'm still pissing
it just seems to go on and on

This is that conversation
we never seem to have
and never seem to finish
~~

When We Were Together

When we were together
I told myself
it wasn't very serious
We both had years
in front of us

But now that I've had
those years
I have learned
that it was indeed serious
that I loved you deeply

I doubt that
if I'd known it then
it would have made a difference
but I'm glad I know it now

~~

You Were Polite

Standing nervously
I watched you read a poem
I wrote for you
I watched your eyes
scan the lines
while your lips quirked
and your forehead
lined and unlined
When you were done
you looked at me
You were polite

~~

Me, Yesterday

I quite like
the self I was yesterday
I lifted some weights
and spent 20 minutes
on the stepper
before a sauna

Much better
than the self I was
two days ago (and three and four)
Who could not get my nose
out of a book
Who barely managed my chores

Yes, yesterday's me
was better
and today's me
doesn't feel too bad
coasting a little
~~

I Stirred Your Coffee

I stirred your coffee
with my finger
a silly boy's thing
to impress you
and when I took
my finger out

You licked yours

~~



Oh You Neo Men

Oh you neo men
you proud lovers
of the golden past
You want the house
and the little wife
to cook and clean
and be ready with a beer
for you

Have you thought
that you need a job
to house and feed
and clothe
(except for shoes and socks)
this woman in your kitchen

And the children
(why does that one have red hair)
who will come
without abortion

And have you thought
that perhaps
you will have to reach back
to 1948
to find this woman
~~

A Poetess

Oh well-educated woman
of well-educated parents
and a well-educated husband
You were desperately unhappy
attempted suicide twice
(succeeded the second time)

Diagnosed by posterity
as bipolar
or a victim of the patriarchy
Is it one
or the other
Is it both?

Does patriarchy cause
mental illness
Surely not the reverse
and yet
and yet
~~

Strangers Academic

My friends, my friends
do not allow
these poems into the hands
of strangers academic
To be ripped and torn
licked and shorn
of their ink from the paper
in the quest
for my true meanings
Do not encourage
the solipsist experts
to rewrite my life

I promise you, my friends
there is nothing more here
than you can hear
No more for thee
than you can see

Let the Deep
search somewhere else
for places to walk
their pets
These pages are occupied
this stall, this toilet
is full of shit

~~

Dog, Walking

Dog, walking
with plaid coat
Barks in the half-light
of a rainy October morning
Barks at the cars
and the school bus
All those tires
All those tires
~~

Saturday Matinee

I watched "Crack in the World"
for twenty five cents
Sat in the dark theatre
and watched the scientists
(Oh those damned scientists)
bored a hole too deep
and cracked the world

For 90 minutes
scientists argued
and tried to stop the crack
At one time
a crack in plywood (plywood)
was stopped at a hole
So of course an atom bomb

But nothing worked
and at the end
the brave scientist
and his girlfriend
embraced while all around them
lava boiled

Damned Brits I thought,
an American movie
would have a happy ending
by law
Instead I was scared
more that was reasonable

I walked out
into the afternoon sunshine
Confused and vaguely disturbed
~~

I Went to the Creek

I went to the creek
and Carmen, the neighbour
was fishing for suckers
"You have to watch the line
when it vibrates, they are sucking
and you jerk the hook in"

I took a sucker home
to proudly show my Gran
She said "wonderful"
and boiled it for me
Tasteless thing, full of bones
I never took a fish home again
~~

Fashion Advice

It's life dude
anything can go
with anything

I wasn't sure
but she looked confident
and so I reached out
~~

Just As I Drove Past

Straight pants
sloppy coat
and sloppy shirt
with neatly combed hair

Unfortunate
that she turned away
just as I drove past

~~

Lost in Time

Two boys
lost in time
long hair
and sharing a joint

I feel I should roll down the window
and shout "Get a job
you damned Hippies!"

~~

The Voyeur

Something about the way
the sun comes through
a redhead's hair

Something about the way
she is juggling keys
and coffee at her car

Something about the way
I feel like a voyeur
watching her
~~

Starbucks Drive-Through

Anything special today?
She asked me
as she passed over my coffee

No, just going to park over there
and write some poetry
and then go home

Well have a great day!

~~

The Prizes Prestigious

Today they named
the Nobel Prize for Literature
after some sort of kerfuffle
last year or the one before

And today they named
the fattest bear
heading for hibernation
Although there is some question
of photoshopping
~~

Rather Ominous

The big yellow school-bus
wheels going 'round
drifts by, empty

No students in the seats
No students on the streets
Gone, all gone somewhere

Rather ominous

~~

Alarm Clock

I was up and about
every day
while she slept
So it was up to me
to wake her

She woke up hard
and I had to learn
to forget all she said
for the first three minutes
of her day

~~

About Regrets

You ask me about regrets?

Very well

I regret, when I am sleeping,

I regret grabbing the quilt

my mother made

and hearing a stitch break

while I pull it up

~~

Short Shirts

She was still young enough
to wear her mother's shoes
and other hand me downs

When she moved in
I found myself short
by several shirts

~~

Lines

Lines
up and down
both arms

At least
she didn't ask me
to do the cutting
~~

And Your Dog

Your wife, your daughter
and your dog
have been killed
You gather your guns
and hunt down the killers
And yet it does not bring them back

You do it for them
but they are dead
they do not know
And it does not bring them back

You hunt down the killer's family
all the families, all their countries
And it does not bring them back

You kill wives, daughters
and dogs
And it does not bring them back

For decades you hunt
until finally
without running out
of wives and daughters
and dogs to kill
You are killed
And it does not bring them back

But now the killing
does not stop
This is your gift
This is how your wife, your daughter
your dog
are remembered

And it did not bring them back

~~

MAR 57



GRANDPA TAYLOR & KIM
ENGAGED IN CONVERSATION

I Remember

I can't remember
my father picking me up
and swinging me
before putting me
on his shoulders

I'm supposed to remember
things like that
am I not?
Instead, I remember photographs

There I am
sitting on my grandfather's lap
The grandfather I never met
I remember the photograph
and not the man

~~

I Move, Restless

I move, restless
frustrated
My book set aside
picked up
and set aside again
the glasses tossed
then hunted
This notebook, this pen
lifted three times

I can't find it
there is nothing there
That frustrates me
and yet, there is pressure
in my chest, something
I can't see it
I can't feel it

Easy, let go, breathe
it will come
~~

A Big Tangle

Legs and arms
in a big tangle
my knees hurt
as you thigh presses down
my arm is sweaty
your hair is up my nose
But I'm not letting go
~~

The News

On a Sunday morning
I made the mistake
of looking

Ideas, images and news
leak into my head
The old testament stoning
of non-virgins
at their father's door
The end of whales
America

How can I write
gentle, kindly notes
with all that in my head

~~

Proud

I am much too proud
of burping
It's because I learned how
about ten years ago
and I figure
a ten year old boy
should be burping the alphabet
about now

~~

In The Crawlspace

A dark mass, cobwebs?
In the crawlspace
turns out to be a mole
dried to a mummy
black fur above
bones underneath

Thrown outside
to finish the journey
back to the elements

~~

Restless

She couldn't sit
without draping a leg
over the arm
or both legs

Often she would be
upside down
her long brown hair
flowing across the floor

It was an adventure
to watch her bend
and twist herself
into that old chair

~~

After You Left

Months after you left
I took a jacket from the closet
and put it on
Reaching into the pocket
I found your gloves

My mind stopped
and I could see you
wearing that jacket
looking at me
daring me to tell you
to give it back

I lifted the gloves to my face
they still smelled like you
and I could feel your hand
on my cheek
I put them back into the pocket

~~

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