



# A Stranger in a Distant Land

## Feeling Grateful but also Missing Family

*Elshaimaa Karima*

### BEFORE YOU READ:

1. What does “extended family” mean? Where does your extended family live, and what is that like for you?
2. In the title, “stranger” is a noun. It means someone who is not well known. For example, *Don’t talk to strangers*. “Stranger” can also be an adjective. For example, *In the U.S., the breakfast food seemed strange to me, but the dinner food was even stranger*. Try using both the noun and the adjective in several sentences.

### My Mother Is My Role Model

Life is unpredictable. We need to be strong and resilient. But how can we achieve this? Fortunately, I have a role model in my life who embodies both strength and resilience – my mother. She is my hero, my inspiration, and my advisor.

My mother married my father in her early twenties. My father was a good and kind man. She loved him so much that she agreed to move away from her parents’ town to a distant place where she was a stranger to everyone. They were married for almost 12 years. She still remembers these 12 years as the happiest years of her life.

Unfortunately, my father suddenly passed away. All the love and support she relied on disappeared overnight. She was a widow in her early thirties with five children between the ages of six months and eleven years. How could she carry on? To make things worse, my father’s relatives were not kind to her in any way. They attempted to kick us out of our home, the home that my father built for our family. They stole our inheritance by forging my grandma’s signature.

## She Supported Me to Make a Change

As a result, my mother struggled emotionally, physically, and financially. And yet she has given us so much. We have been lucky to have her guidance, as well as support from her side of the family. That support was one of the main reasons she was able to endure such hardships. This is why it was a surprise to me when my mom supported my decision to move away from my family. “Family is important,” she said, “but you will need to have your own home, and with the right person, you won’t feel so far away from family.”

So, why did I decide to move away from the life I was used to and everyone I knew? Well, it’s a long story that I can summarize in three little words: Ahmed, my husband. He is a kind and tender gentleman who I knew would make me happy. Traveling so far away wasn’t easy. It was a challenge to live in a foreign country with different traditions and customs.

Luckily, here in the U.S., I have my Aunt Leila. She is a caring lady who treats me like her daughter. She was by my side when I had to go through surgery two weeks after I delivered my son. She took care of my newborn when I was under anesthesia and recovering.

Hanging out with Aunt Leila and my husband’s small social circle helped me a lot, but it wasn’t enough. I was still lonely and isolated. My husband encouraged me to venture out to socialize with other people, but I wasn’t familiar with U.S. social norms, and I couldn’t communicate well in English. My husband persisted. He supported me to take my citizenship exam, and he showed me how to go to the library. He encouraged me to learn to drive (something I had never done before I came to the U.S.).

## My Son Misses His Extended Family

My son always wonders about our family in Egypt. He asks, “Why aren’t they here with us? Why don’t I have grandparents nearby like my friends do?” Once he asked me, “If you and Dad die, will I be left alone?” This is why I’m looking

forward to the day my family joins us in the U.S. This will be the day that my son will no longer fear being left alone after my husband and I are gone.

I am grateful for everything I have: friendships, family, and opportunities. But the truth is, living away from your family in a foreign land is still painful, especially when you lose those you love and depend on. Two months ago, I lost Aunt Leila, and six weeks later, I lost my grandma. It hurts so much to be away when you need to be close to receive a comforting embrace. But by the grace of God, I will prevail and be resilient in the face of being a stranger in a distant land. After all, I had a strong and resilient hero in my life.

---

**My sons asks,  
“Why don’t I have  
grandparents nearby  
like my friends do?”**

---

### AFTER YOU READ:

1. What ways does the author show her strength and resilience in this story?
2. Study the chart of adjectives, comparative adjectives, and superlative adjectives. Can you identify any patterns or rules? Make your own list with more examples of these types of adjectives.

Adjective	Comparative Adjective	Superlative Adjective
kind	kinder	kindest
strong	stronger	strongest
strange	stranger	strangest
happy	happier	happiest
funny	funnier	funniest
different	more different	most different
delicious	more delicious	most delicious
good	better	best
bad	worse	worst

---

*Elshaimaa Karima is a student at Pawtucket Adult Education in Pawtucket, RI. She immigrated to the United States from Egypt a couple of years ago. She has a Bachelor’s degree in science from Egypt.*