

The assylum seeker



My name is Ali and I come from Libya . After a week of roughing it on a empty carriage of a cargo train and then hiding on the deck of a fishing trawler I had arrived in England. Cold, frightened and hungry though I was, I had still made it! For the first time in many years a smile revisited my face. As a man and woman accompanied by two children, strolled past, that moment of triumph quickly passed and soon was replaced with a great sadness for the family that I had left back in Libya.

My wife and my two children, how were they coping? hat were they doing at this moment? A yawning pit of dread opened inside me as I walked down the ramps and through the docks. I was climbing the ladder of uncertainty. Countless questions swirled in my mind none of which I had the answer to. Were the people here friendly? Were they going to accept me, but most importantly would all my efforts bear fruit? Pushing these thoughts from my mind I nurtured the determination within me, letting it flare brightly. I was going to get in, my family was counting on me. I would not let them throw me out without a fight.

As I wandered through the streets people cast ugly glances at me and muttered in hushed tones. Blanking them, I carried on. A tall man dressed in black and wearing a funny looking black domed hat approached me. Trying to avoid a confrontation I walked quickly in the other direction. Glancing back I saw that the man was talking rapidly into a device in his hand and had started chasing after me. Not knowing what else to do, I stopped and put my hands in front of me disarmingly. Walking briskly up to me, he searched me, not finding anything he then promptly shoved me against the nearest wall and handcuffed me.

Feeling confused and helpless I shouted and struggled, no one moved to help. How could they let this happen? Where was the local law enforcement? This was a regular occurrence in Libya, but here as well? Only later that night in a county jail cell, (a jail cell which was warm and dry!) was it made clear to me that the man who had handcuffed me was a police officer. That night I was given food and water and there was actually meat! Along with filling bread which smelled so delicious, Mmmmmm. I had never been so grateful in my life for this and ate with great care.

The next day I was interrogated agonisingly. 'Me seek a-ssylum. ' I said quickly. 'Ok, ok. ' said the officer reassuringly. 'What is your name? ' 'Me Ali. ' I managed to stutter in broken English. 'Where do you come from? ' asked the officer slowly. Repeating the question again, 'W-h-e-r-e-d-o-y-o-u-c-o-m-e-f-r-o-m-? After a long pause, 'I--- I--I, I c-come from Li-b-y-a. ' I said struggling. 'Do you have any identification? ' asked the officer patiently. I shrugged helplessly, 'Me see-EEK ass-y--lum. ' I said again.

At that moment the officer motioned to someone behind the door. A tall man with a hard set face entered the room. 'This man is from the Home Office. ' said the officer. 'He will evaluate your claim for assylum. ' 'Come with me. ' said the man icily. I took a grateful breath of much needed fresh air as we stepped into the cold wet morning. Wasting no time we got into a black van and then drove for over an hour. Finally we reached our destination, a looming office building which rose over 30 metres in the air. My heart started beating faster as I got out of the van.

Offering no reassurance and seemingly blind to my situation the man started for the building. Now heart in my throat, I quickly followed on legs that were about to collapse. All my previous resolve had dissipated and no matter how hard I tried I could not summon any back. An hour into the interview, I was sweating profoundly through every pore, by now my throat was parched and there was a vast wet patch on my backside and all along my back. The air itself seemed to be wrapping itself more and more tightly around me, suffocating me.

Speaking in Arabic to the translator I made one last desperate speech.

'Please, there is no element of freedom in our lives, my family works for a 14 hour day and still find it hard to buy the basic necessary essentials. Most importantly we see no future for our children, they need to focus on their education but they can't, seeing as they have to work as well as study in order for us to have enough money to live on. Rita who is ten years old wears the clothes that her sister has grown out of since we cannot afford new clothes.

Neither I nor my wife want this life for our children. ' Slumping into my chair drained, I waited for the translator to translate what I had just said. The home office official stood up to make his decision, I tensed..... As I stepped back into the fresh air I breathed out deeply. Being preoccupied with worry and anticipation, I became aware of the surroundings which I didn't notice before, the flowers, the line of trees and towering buildings in the distance. This was a world apart from where I had grown up. I would lay down a new life here. Now to get my family through.