

EXTRACT

Auckland

a text for theatre

by

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SHAHWALI: My name is Shahwali Basiri but you can call me Shah. For short. You can also call me Wally but I would prefer Shah. I am thirty two years old. I have a wife Akimeh, and three children - two strong boys, Mahdi and Hadi, and a beautiful little girl, Lila. I come from Vardak.

I am Hazari. I am also a Muslim. When they took our country in 1996 Hazaris were denounced as Heretics. They are fundamentalists and although we are also Muslims we were seen as too liberal. In 1998 thousands of Hazaris were killed. Thousands more were beaten and tortured. They say you could hear the screams a hundred miles away. In Vardak we knew we were next. They gave us a contract which every adult male had to sign. It said we were safe for now but if anything did happen all the young men would be taken. In March that year something did happen. Fighting broke out and my brother Fahir was killed. We knew we were next so myself and my two remaining brothers went into hiding. They came to our house and beat my father but he did not tell them where we were. For three months we hid, my wife and children left at home. Alone. But for us to be killed, slowly, stage by stage. To leave my family without anybody to look after them. I decided to get out but finding a new life is expensive. To get money my father sold his house and one of his shops. It was just enough to buy five hiding places on a lorry. Enough for me and my family and one of my brothers but my youngest brother was forced to stay behind.

On the first night we hid in the back of the truck as we drove slowly along the bumpy road. It was a warm, still night and we were very scared as we could see trucks passing by us full of fighters. If they stopped us it would mean instant death. We stayed in a house in the city the next night and then we were put into a minibus. This part was safer and with better roads but we were still in great danger. We were given false passports and the next day we walked across the border into Pakistan and away from our home. When we realised we were in Pakistan we cried for joy. I had no idea then how awful our journey would be and that we would face even more danger, greater even than those we had left behind. The sea is a formidable foe. From Peshawar we travelled in an old bus right across Pakistan to Karachi, a trip that took many days. The children were tired and hungry. Then we were put on a plane to Kuala Lumpur and finally Jakarta. The agents had cleared our path very well. At no time were our travel documents ever questioned. In Jakarta we were taken to the countryside where we stayed for over three weeks.

It seemed to be a popular holiday destination and it felt strange to walk along the beach - we escaped Hazaris - amongst the tourists and holiday makers - enjoying their summer break. There were a lot of people there from many different countries so they were not suspicious of my little family. Then, one Tuesday, we were suddenly dragged from our house around midnight. No warning was given. We climbed into eight buses and we and over four hundred others made the six hour journey to a beach on the western side of the main island. Then we walked for a mile or so down a jungle track and there before us stood a little fishing boat - the KM Palapa. It sat quietly in the water, swaying gently from side to side, waiting to take us to the edge of death.