

Lily (pen name) is a volunteer with Leicester City of Sanctuary. She wrote this poem after accompanying a vulnerable asylum seeker to his interview with a UKBA Immigration Official. She had felt helpless in providing him with any comfort. However, any act of small kindness helps people find faith in humanity again. This particular asylum seeker was eventually granted leave to remain after two years and has been offered a place at university. Please contact Colleen@cityofsanctuary.org if you wish to use this poem so that “Lily” can be informed. She is happy for it to be shared widely including in performances.

Blue Folder

By Lily Silverman – City of Sanctuary Volunteer

“What’s your favourite colour?” I said.

“Blue”, you said.

We’ll get you a blue folder then,

A blue folder to put all this in.

He had been walking around with his paperwork in a plastic bag.

A plastic bag the photographers gave him when they took his photo.

The photo for the United Kingdom Border Agency.

A photo for the UKBA.

A plastic bag for the letters from his counsellor,

His doctor,

His caseworker,

His social worker,

The Foundation for the victims of torture.

It’s not nice to walk around with papers like this in a plastic bag, I said.

We’ll buy you a folder.

A blue folder.

That will make everything better.

You didn't talk much on the way there.

I sat quietly with you; in your silence.

Your silent place that is haunted with your screaming,

As they tortured you.

With the screaming you can hear of others,

As they were being tortured.

With your mother crying.

With the distance you ran with them shooting bullets after you.

With the pain of wanting your mother, and your brother, and your family.

In that silent place I sat with you, although I am not privy to the screaming.

A silent place filled with loud pain.

I can see your unshaven face.

I can see where your hood hides you so nobody can see you.

I can see you hide behind a tree, or look nervously away when you think you are overheard.

I can hear the trembling in your voice, and how sometimes you speak in a barely audible tone.

I can hear all that, but I cannot hear the screams inside your head.

The letter from the GP was good we said,

Good.

15 Cigarette burns on your right arm,

Seven on your left.

Marks on your upper and lower body consistent with electrocution;

With being hit with iron bars;

And heavy metal objects.

A third of a page... line after line.

Descriptions of the marks consistent with torture.

It was a good letter, yes.

We will buy you a folder to put it in,

With all the others,

Make it all better.

We sat on the train, the sunshine reminds you of home.

Home... a place you miss.

Home... a place your family are in.

Home... the place you went to university.

Home... the place your brother is in.

Home... the place you are so homesick for now.

“Is there anything you want to tell us” said the lady at the asylum screening interview.

“I don’t want to go home”, you said.

We sat in the sun and we played backgammon,

That didn’t make it better.

I brought you a croissant and fizzy apple juice.

That didn’t make it better.

I asked you what films you liked and you told me;

And then you told me how they took your computer.

I wanted to say we can make it better ...

A blue folder, that’s it, a blue folder.

We’ll put all this in a blue folder.

Your favourite colour.

That will make it all better.