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SO FAR FROM THE SUNLIT MOUNTAIN

Do you know how hard it is to leave your family behind?

It has been two weeks since you made us step off that boat onto these transitory shores, the place we wanted to be but not. It has been two weeks but we can still hear the crunching of our stomachs, which can't be felt above the wrenching of our hearts.

Now we sit and wait for those who have not seen our hollow faces and our peeling hands. We Tamils from Jaffna. We sit and wait for you to decide where we are to go. You want to send us back, or to some other place we have not heard of—this Nauru place. We sit and wait, and dream of sunlit mountains seven horizons away. Where we want to go but cannot.

If we had known that we were travelling from torture to more torture, would we have left? Yes, we would have left. We would have tempted fate and mounted a sail of forlorn hope, and prayed the wind would blow us along another path by chance. But we are here, where we aimed to be but not. And you want to send us away. Do you not see the scars on our hands?

We sit here now, we Tamils from Jaffna, dreaming of a sun-drenched mountain, under whose watchful eyes we saw our children play. We dream of dinners as the dusk grows near, our hands full of appam and our ears dancing to the sound of the pullangulal. But our tongues only taste reality and our ears soon fall down in silence.

We think of the promises we made to our wives, the oaths of hands full of freedom. Such stories we'd told about this land to the south. This land of yours with draw-bridge drawn and moat patrolled. After a while we don't think, because it hurts too much. But the pain always comes back.

Do you know how hard it is to leave your family behind?

And how much harder it is to go back with empty hands?