

## EXCERPT

When I was a child, I met a Sudanese man. He had come to Bucharest to study medicine. According to family lore, he wanted to marry me and take me away to Khartoum. I was ready. I already had a white dress.

I'm wearing that same dress on the jetty in a photograph taken on the Black Sea, in the town once called Callatis, near the Bulgarian border. From that picture I remember every single detail of the dress. The drop waist, the fine texture of the trim, the simple cut and elegance of the neckline and sleeves, the hem at just the right height. The dress divides my body, continuing the white line painted on the asphalt of the sea wall.

I am right in the middle, on the white line.

The photographer is behind me. I'm walking alone and skipping along the white line as if I were playing hopscotch. White rocks on either side flank the slightly raised paved walkway. Did they paint the line to direct pedestrian traffic? On the right toward the lighthouse, on the left for those heading home. From here, the restaurants and the casino on the shore look like matchboxes.

Farther along there are Greco-Roman ruins, a few remnants of columns barely visible. The jetty is where fishermen meet, where families come out for a walk at the end of the afternoon. In the evenings it's a place for lovers.

It's my favourite picture. My entire being seems contained in this one image, walking confidently to the lighthouse.

I wonder if that Sudanese man is still alive, if he went home after finishing medical school in Bucharest. Subconsciously, I'm still the bride of Khartoum. Maybe that's why I would have wanted things with Célestin to start there. What remains of that wish is a photograph, a postcard. In my head, that's where we met.