



*2 PARTS
OF DESIRE*

Akabarar

I was 25 years old when I left Eritrea. I studied economics. In Eritrea equality means military service is obligatory for men & women. It's meant to be for 18 months but when year after year I asked for my rights, I was ignored. For 4 years I was forced to serve my country. I had heard of many women dying in the war. Fear, there was always fear...of being sent to war & of Ethiopia's massive army invading & killing us all.

The commanders wanted to sexually exploit the female soldiers. Women were asked to do as the commanders wanted, & in return some were promised release. "If you have my child, you will be released from the army." I was not willing to give in. I knew that it would harm my dreams, that my life & all I wanted would be affected negatively. I thought, "if I am not released from the army I would not have any freedom." I just desired to live my own life!

I didn't tell anyone I was going to leave. Since I was in the army, the punishment for crossing the border illegally would have been much more serious for me. In the Sahara your biggest fear is to lose direction, but getting to Sudan it's that you'll get caught. Sudan wasn't easy, especially for women...they are not free, always under someone's control. Being illegal, I was in constant danger. Being illegal & a woman made it much worse, more at risk. We were afraid of security officers, that we'd be arrested & taken to the police stations. We knew that bad things happened there, many women were ordered to sleep with the officers.

I spent my 8 months in Khartoum gathering enough courage to start my journey across the Sahara desert. We were 29 packed in a Land Cruiser. Left, right, forward, backward, only sand. 8 days. We were lucky, others take much longer because they get lost. Our Cruiser broke down, but again we were lucky & managed to fix it. We made it. Many others die.

In Libya I heard stories of people who were arrested, put in metal containers & driven for days out into the desert...then left there. Is that the boat that will take us to Europe? It was just too funny, we all thought it was a joke! I could die in the sea. When the weather got bad, & the sea starting getting rough, things became bad. Our boat capsized, & at that moment I thought it was the end. I desperately searched the water around me, looking for other people. No time to scream, or cry, or shout for help. Oh, & I don't know how to swim!

I knew nothing of Malta when I was saved & brought here. 4 months in detention, in Lyster Barracks. No freedom. Then to the tents. Always afraid. Now I'm married & have 2 children. I had more courage in Eritrea, I'm a bit broken now, but getting slowly fixed. Why doesn't Malta open the door, even just a little bit, for migrants to integrate?