Port Sudan

I listen to my father’s voice on the phone.  
He wants me to come from America to see him. 
He does not want to die and be put ’m the earth, 
my sweet father: who held me so high 
above the waters of the Red Sea, when I was five. 
Who saw the white ship, the S. S. Jehangir docking 
at Port Sudan and came sprinting for me, 
through a crowd of labourers forced 
to raise bales of cotton to their heads.

Someone cried: “KefHalek!”
My skirt spun in the wind 
and Arabic came into my mouth 
and rested alongside all my other languages. 
Now I know the truth of my tongue 
starts where translations perish. 
Where voices cease 
and I face the image of the Pharaoh

The one who murmured at the hour of his death 
throat turned towards the restless waters: 
“If I forget Upper Egypt, cut off my right hand.  
Here lies memory.”
The same man loved his daughter so 
he knew she needed knowledge of the imprints of earth, 
glyphs cut in granite 
inscriptions on rough cloth 
underwater moorings and the black sun of death.

MEENA ALEXANDER