

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