

SAMPLE CHAPTERS



The Illustrated Boatman's Daughter

By Tom Durwood

Tom works hard for his readers. Enjoy this excerpt.



“There is in Egypt the most important isthmus in the world, that separating its great seas, the Ocean and the Mediterranean: a place that cannot be avoided without circling all the sinuosities of Africa; the connecting point, the obstacle, the key, the only possible door between two areas of the world ...”

-- Gottfried von Leibnitz, in a 1672 letter to Louis XIV urging France to send an army to Egypt





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The Illustrated Boatman's Daughter



by Tom Durwood

Illustrations by

Serena Malyon
Niklas Frostgard
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Oliver Ryan
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Foreword

I live on the other side of the globe from the US, and wondered, the day I received Tom Durwood's email, why ask me specifically to write the Foreword for his new YA novel, *The Illustrated Boatman's Daughter*. There is no previous personal acquaintance, and the only thing we share is our love for writing and literature. However, from the first few lines into the novel, Tom successfully drew me into the world of his narrative, and the more I read, the more I understood his motive for choosing me. He is writing about events and places in history I relate to. After all, Arab countries in the Middle East and North Africa share more than similar historical background. They share language, religious beliefs, literature, habits and customs, and last but not least, internal corruption and political struggles against the west and the north.

The building of the Suez Canal in the second half of the 19th century was a political and economic event par excellence. France and The United Kingdom financed the project as a debt to the Egyptian Pasha, while they knew very well that he did not have the means to pay them off. Thus, they held power over all the operations of the Canal, which gave them access to the gateway between East and West, therefore a more direct route for their trade between the North Atlantic and the North Indian oceans. This lasted for almost a hundred years, by which time Gamal Abdel Nasser took power and nationalized it.

The main character of this adventure YA graphic novel, Salima, is a heroine in the true sense. She is captivating with her power of will, fearlessness, fierceness, charisma and fairness. She is afraid of no one; and no man, no matter how strong physically or politically he is, intimidates her. A role model that every young reader will admire.

Salima, along with her new friend Emilie, are hired by the Agency Mickler Sykes commissioned by the Pasha of Egypt himself to oversee shipments delivering goods and machineries for the construction of the Suez Canal. The shipments are being robbed, so Salima's job is to authenticate the contents of each shipment's cargo before allowing the men to unload and before

giving the clear for the payment of the deliverables to go through. Since matters of corruption turn out to be on a very wide scale, the events of this adventure story progress fast and confrontations take drastic turns at times. Salima, together with Emilie and their friends Mikal and Khalil, make it their mission to fight corruption and mistreatment of field workers. They go through dangerous incidents, always having each other's backs, until they accomplish their goals.

Tom Durwood craftily parallels the events taking place in his story to ancient history, where Pharaoh Senusret may have started work on a canal joining the Nile with the Red Sea. The richness of the layers of Tom's novel is compelling. It shows how history repeats itself. Power struggles between East and West, slavery, the prevalence of injustice where common people always pay the price, are all issues tackled by the author in a very subtle manner. This leaves the reader with a lot to feel and to think about. The forty pieces of art in this graphic novel complete the experience of the reader in visualizing the world of the story. The illustrations are colored at times, and in grey scale at other times. I believe the diversity in the styles of the various artists who realized the art work adds to the richness of the book. The illustrations depict many elements, among which are the Nile, the canal, barges, ships, pharaohs, tombs, torches, air balloons, cotton fields, in addition to some of the characters, namely Salima.

Tom demonstrates a great deal of enthusiasm in his writing of this thoroughly researched project. He successfully and powerfully weaves real facts to create the world of the story, be it events, places, characters, and actions. And what better way to educate the youth about historical events that shaped our past and cast their influence on our present.

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Fatima Sharafeddine is a writer and translator for children and young adults, winner of several awards and honor lists, among which the Etisalat Award for the best YA book of the year 2017 for "Cappuccino", (Al-Saqi publishers), and the Bologna Ragazzi New Horizons Award for her book "Tongue Twisters" (Kalimat publishers). Her YA novel "Mila's Pear" was

shortlisted for the Etisalat Award 2019, and she was nominated 5 times for the Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award, the last nomination being in 2020. She has written over 140 books, several of which have been translated to various languages, among which are Dutch, Danish, Spanish, Catalan, French, German, English, Russian, Chinese, Korean, Turkish, Norwegian, Italian and Swedish. She participates in various book fairs and conferences focusing on children's literature, and offers group workshops in creative writing, as well as private writing sessions for aspiring authors. More information can be found on her webpage: www.fatimasharafeddine.com

Author's Welcome

I have invited a handful of young illustrators to interpret the adventures of Salima and Company, each in their own style. Serena Malyon, Niklas Frostgard, Oliver Ryan, Faustine Dumontier, Ardalan Izanian, Zelda Devon and Kevin Fleeman have produced some powerful images which will compensate readers for the shortcomings of my writing. My hope is to give readers a wealth of visuals, even if the artists' interpretations are different.

The Suez Canal represents something far more than a waterway. It is a gateway between two worlds, and its construction aroused some of the same deep, explosive passions that we see in East/West interactions of today. The Canal cost one hundred million dollars -- a colossal number in 1867 currency, and an amount which the naive Caliph guaranteed, indebting the entire Egyptian nation for decades. His English and French bankers knew full well he could never repay such an amount from the Canal's proceeds. *Booyah*. We will cross a similar bridge in King James' Seventh Company.

The real story beneath the adventures of "The Boatman's Daughter" may be that of the fedayeen. The Egyptian working classes funded the greatest of all civil projects, slaved to build it, and watched Britain and France steal it. I wish Salima's tent speech had actually taken place.

The full text to this story can be found in my collection *Ulysses S. Grant in China and Other Stories*. You will find historical context to the rich Suez era, and much more, at www.boatmansdaughter.com.

-- Tom Durwood

CHAPTER FIVE: The Scottish Boat

The time is not far away that we will feel that,
in order to truly destroy England, we must take Egypt.

-- Napoleon Bonaparte in a letter dated 16 August 1797

On the great docks where the Scottish boat was docked, Salima picked out the most senior, most officious, biggest, meanest-looking, most intimidating Scotsman she could find.

It was massive, bustling scene theater. The mighty ship Viola, like some behemoth ship from a land of giants, rocked in its berth. The ocean waves made slurping sounds. Dozens of longshoremen pushed and lifted and shouted on the ramps and bridges and in the open doors of the vessel's vast cargo bays. Thick hemp nets lowered gargantuan wooden crates from gantries far above the docks.

She walked up to him. She introduced herself. The man reluctantly took her hand.

"And what is your name, brother? What might I call you?"

"Sullivan," he bellowed, smirking. "Baird Sullivan. First Captain."

"Captain Sullivan. Open all the crates. Please."

The remark had been framed as a request, but it was definitely not a request.

"Open all the crates, then open all the bags inside all the crates."

"Ask the bursar."

"I'm asking you."

He made no motion to do as she requested.



Salima turned and gave a loud whistle. She waved her hands for the unloading and stacking to all stop. Mikal, beside her, did the same. Mickler Sykes agents up and down the line blew their whistles until the call echoed.

Men shouted. Work slowed. Confusion reigned even as activity slowed to a halt. A stevedore swore bitterly and asked what the problem was. Heads turned towards Salima. One of the giant French cranes swung to and fro in mid-air.

The docks were quiet.

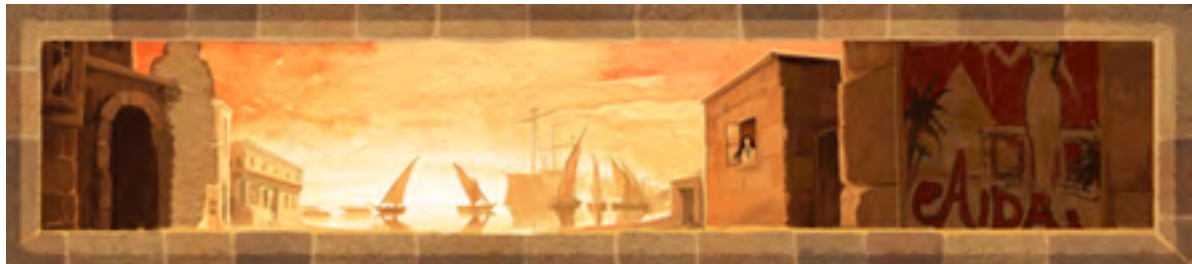
Baird Sullivan stroked his cheek, beginning to understand.

A nervous-looking seaman ran up and handed Salima a clipboard.

“Do you know how this works, Mister Sullivan?” she asked as she looked through the documents. “All of this?”

“Naow, pharaoh-girl. I doan’t. Why doan’t you tell me?”

“I represent the government of Egypt. The client. See this badge? I am receiving the goods. If I am not satisfied that these documents accurately represent what actually lies beneath these box slats and canvas coverings, then I won’t sign this.” She showed him the documents of transfer (long form). “Client has not received goods.” She showed it to all the crowd, turning one way, then another, then another.



“I serve the Queen of England!” he called out. “I serve Egypt,” said the Boatman’s Daughter.

“And if I don’t sign these forms, this gentleman cannot take it to the Bank of Cairo – it’s three blocks away. You can see it from here. Can you make it out, Captain? There it is. That white brick building. No signed forms, no Bank of Cairo. And you can pack all this and return to Glasgow. Tell all these men that their wages will not be forthcoming. No pay. No back pay. Or maybe you can find another nation building a canal, and sell these goods to them.”

“Ahmed can sign it,” said Sullivan defensively.

“Ahmed is no longer here. I am here.”

“Let an orderly sign it, then.”

“He has no authority to do so.

“It is not a legal document without my signature. It cannot be traded, nor rendered whole without it.”

“Then you sign it.”

“Show me the cargo.”

“Nach, woman – I’ll no’ open my cargo, no’ for tha likes of thee.”

“We will need them on each and every consignment from this ship.”

“I beyg your pardon...”

“You may beg it, sire, but I shall not grant it.”

Salima stood on the ramp as though she would never move. Sullivan blinked. For the first time, he took a closer notice of the yellow and blue badge around her neck.

A stevedore shouted from the distance to give her what she wanted.

“You will soon receive a telegram,” said Salima, “from Mister Ryan Joyce-Bader, president of the Glasgow Shipping Company, who right now is sitting in the Bank of Glasgow waiting for the transfer of funds.”

She handed the papers back to the Captain.

“See these? These numbers do not correlate, Captain Sullivan. There are only four serial numbers where there should be five. Where are the complete terms of conveyance? One-third of the goods have grown legs and walked off, and now reside in the back rooms and warehouses of the merchants of Cairo. This -- ” she made a gesture to include all of the docks and all of them working on them, as if were one living system -- “this is not what we are buying.”

A crowd of riggers and stevedores and even the steam-shovel and crane men crowded in, to see how this drama might turn out.

“Open all the crates,” she said again. “Open all the crates, then open all the bags inside all the crates.”

“You impayrrtinent little wog -- ” But Second Captain Sullivan was already being led away by the men of the Viola.

“I serve the Queen of England!” he called out.

“I serve Egypt,” said the Boatman’s Daughter. “Let us see who is sovereign.”

* * *

Late that night, Salima awoke to splashing sounds.

Living silhouettes of Cairo at night waited patiently through the window, on the complex horizon, sending their soft light through the suite's curtained windows. A guard heard her rise and asked through the door if all was well.

Even this far past midnight, the Citadel and the city beyond were very much alive. Salima stood at the window. She paused by the clock, unused to machine sounds. She opened the door to the bath chamber.

The collie was sitting unhappily in a bathtub full of suds. Emilie rubbed shampoo through his fur as she hummed.

"He's perfect, isn't he?" The French girl poured water over the dog's head, so that the contours of his nose and face came through.

Fadil looked pleadingly at Salima.

"We have running water, even at night?"

"Yes, they have water towers on the roof. The gravity pulls it down. It's very modern. Paris on the Nile. You can't use too much, though, or they'll come running up and yell at you.

"You must forgive my mother," said Emilie. "She does not mean to be such a snob. I am a snob myself. Worse than her.

"I'm nervous for tomorrow. What do I know of dredging machines?"



"You know how to keep a ledger," answered Salima. "You know how to treat a person."

"I am not you. They all want me to be you."

“Just ask for the documents. They’ll bring them. Say no, you want all of them. Then look the papers over for a long time. Look like you’re very, very concerned. Then hand them back. Say they’re not good enough.”

The prospect of this procedure seemed to satisfy Emilie.

“I hope we see the dig,” said Salima, yawning. “I have heard about it from the fedayeen families. They call it a miracle.”

“Too muddy,” commented Emilie.

She turned the faucet, filled her cup, and poured it over Fadil’s head.

“Oops, that was cold water. I’m sorry, Fadil.

“Your father is very fine,” said Emilie.

“I wouldn’t say ‘fine,’” replied Salima. “He is ... big. And loud.”

“He is a real man. A real father. Mine is skinny. Like a drawing of a father.”

“Is he French?”

“Yes. We don’t see him much. He travels, for the bank,” said Emilie.

“He is mad that Mother allows me this adventure. He prefers me to be kept home, in a castle turret, feeding birds from the window.

“He would say ‘By Christ, Emilie!’ or ‘By the Christ who saved me, girl!’” Emilie shook her head. She ran her fingers through the dog’s coat, drawing out the soap.

“My father has a mistress. In Lyon.”

Salima looked at her blankly.

“A mistress. Girlfriend. Like a second wife. An illegal wife. It’s a scandal. My cousin saw her, once. She was carrying a bright red umbrella.” She snorted.

“Is that bad?”

“It’s bourgeois.”

“Is that bad?”

“Yes. Very.”

“What does your mother say?”

“‘*Honi soit qui mal y pense.*’ It is one of her trademark sayings.” She took a towel and wiped suds from the dog’s cheek, then from her own.

“I am sick of her trademark sayings.”

“Do you have a saying?” asked Salima.

“Yes. Yes, I do. It’s not a saying but a rule. Rule Seven: Enough is enough.”

Salima poured a cup of clean water on the dog’s head.

“If it were up to me,” said Emilie, “I would live in Central America, at the edge of a jungle. That’s how I feel. I’d have six children, and they wouldn’t even go to school --” She paused to wipe her eyes.

“I’ve seen pictures. Panama. Darien. They have fruits and trees everywhere and monkeys who can paint your portrait, and parrots everywhere. Panthers walk along the low tree limbs, or so they say.”

Emilie fingered the wristlet which the Dutch agents had given her. It held a symbol, an antique compass etched in henna.

“Do you have one of these?” she asked Salima.

Salima held up her left wrist: there, tattooed on her skin, was the same mark. “Since I was I child,” she said.

“Why on earth --” began Emilie --

But the dog, seeing his chance, leapt out of the tub in a rush of water and soap and shook out his black and white coat. He got right by Salima and shook hard, just to show that he would not stand for such treatment ever again.

“Fadil invokes Rule Seven,” laughed Emilie.

CHAPTER NINE : Driven by Sticks

Their appearance (that of the corvee labourers) was very pitiable. All told us that they did not come of their own free will; they came by force ‘b’il nabut’ (driven by sticks).

-- *Report from a chaplain from British Consulate in Alexandria*

“What are you counting now” Mikal asked Salima, grabbing the hand with the counting fingers.

She laughed, but did not look up from her ledgers. Nor did she take away her hand from his. “None of your business.”

They sat on the gunwale of one of those shims, the smallish, stylish wood-cabin boats you see darting easily among the heavy-keeled pleasure boats. They were in the sweet water channel, headed west from Cairo, towards Deir-el-Bahi and the Dutch distilling compound. A long evening before had been spent disembarking an American ship, The Sea Witch, because no one can tell an American anything.

The morning fog was thick. They could scarcely see through the mist. It was as if they were surrounded by a gray silk curtain, absorbing sound, blocking the vistas. Waves slapped gently on the boat’s hull.

“It’s all my business,” he said. “I have been charged with ensuring your safety, your comfort, your happiness -- ”

“My happiness!”

“I just added that one.”

“Well,” she said, “that is some new -- ”

With a shout Mikal rushed to the boat’s bridge; he had seen something in the fog. Salima looked after him, surprised.

“I told you to never to approach from the east!” barked Mikal to the pilot.

She turned, and could begin to see gaps and streaks in the curtain of mists.

“Damn! Come about now, damn you -- ”

The channel was much narrower than she assumed, and there on the shores, beyond the hull, she could see –

Are those -- ?

Mikal cursed in a torrent of angry Dutch. “I gave the clearest of

instructions – DAMMIT, man”

“But sir, I --”

Emilie and her mother emerged from below decks.

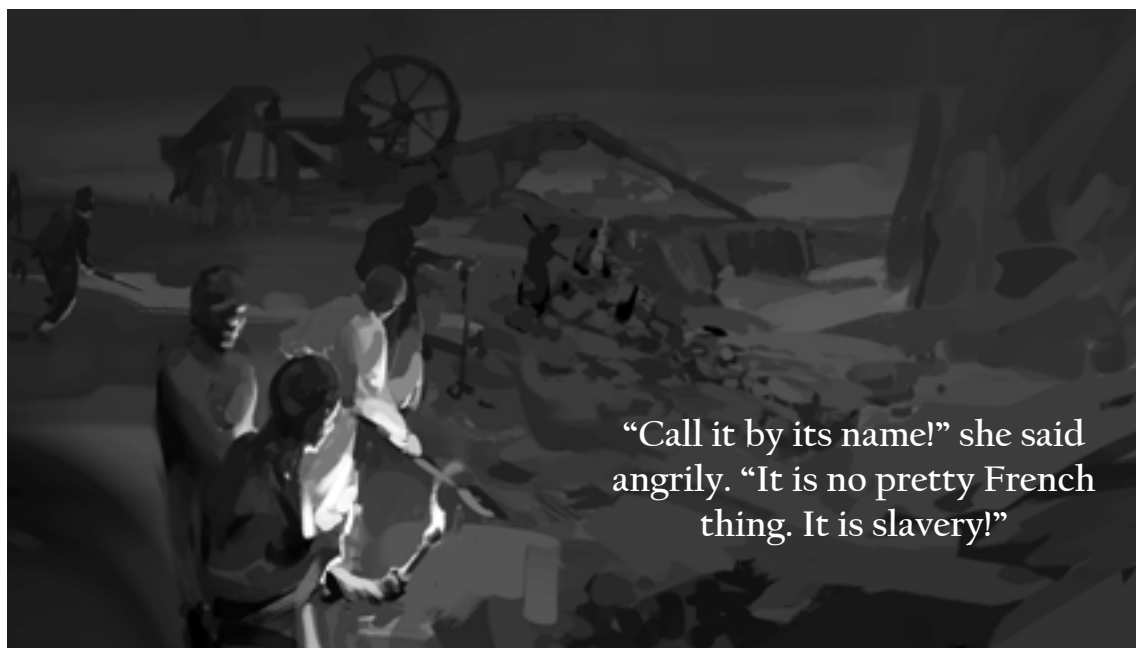
“Stop the boat,” said Salima.

“Come about --” ordered Mikal.

“Stop the boat!”

The hapless pilot, having attempted to turn in too small a space, ran the boat aground on the sandy shore.

Appearing at first like dots, a grouping or two, and a quartet just beyond them, then more – clusters of dots, until finally the ragged fog revealed a sea of them. These were the diggers. This was the corvee. Scores, stretching into hundreds of the fedayeen, men just like her father, just like the men and women she saw in her father’s barges every day, all of them huddled prone in the fields of mud, scooping dirt and sand with their bare hands. The curtain of fog broke up, and they could see a bit more. All the way to the horizon they seemed to stretch.



“I’m so sorry, Salima --” said Mikal, splashing after her. “You weren’t supposed to see --”

The ghostlike fedayeen labored in a most forlorn cadence, as if resigned to endless time on this endless of tasks. The shim had wandered into the middle of the swampy eastern channels, where the ground was too unstable for machines to operate, and only human labor would do.

Salima stepped off the gunwale, into knee-deep waters, the collie at her

heels. The dog understood the gravity of the mission, for he moved smartly and with never a glance left or right, ignoring distractions that would normally take his attention.

She sought out one familiar form, he kneeling in the muck, scraping in the sand with his cupped hands.

"It is me," she said, kneeling to lift one of the men. "Salima. The Boatman's Daughter."

The old man looked up, not understanding. Mud stained his neck and cheeks.

"Your nephew," she continued. "Your nephew, Ma'at, is my father's first mate. On the barges. You used to ferry your little boys to Marsa Alam with us. Do you remember now?"

A light of recognition sparked in the old man's face.

"Ah! Just so! That was long ago," said the old man. "My girl, you shouldn't be --" He tried to stand and bow, but his knees collapsed.

"Bring water!" she called over her shoulder. "He is weak --"

To him, she said, "You cannot stay here, effendim. You are too thin."

Emilie brought a leather canteen of water, turning her nose at the mud's stench.

Salima held a cup to the emaciated man's lips.

"We dig the great canal," the old man said. "For Egypt --"

"Rest easy, uncle," said the Boatman's Daughter.

"Do not cry for me, ya rouhi!" The old man touched her shoulder. "I do my part. It is well."

Out of the fog came a guard. He lashed at the old man, then at a second worker who had stopped digging. Salima grabbed the lash and yanked it so the guard fell forward.

"Come, mameluke! Touch him again --"

She sliced the lash with a broad-bladed knife that had suddenly appeared in her hand. It was no polite dagger, this, but a workman's blade, and one she intended to use.

The guard rushed, bristling with menace.

"Try me, thou eunuch," she growled.

The young guard then noticed Mikal and the boat, with its commission seal. Confused, he showed his palms and backed off.

"Take this canteen, brother," said Salima, falling to her knees in the mud to help another bent-backed laborer in the muddy slough. "I have some food

--



Salima grabbed the lash and yanked it so the guard fell forward. “Come, mameluke! Touch him again --”

“Bring them our lunch if you will, Madame. These are all my friends.”

Two hours later, when they had given away all they had, and returned to the ship, Salima said nothing, and would take no comfort. The boat moved through water in a terrible silence, a silence like a living thing, accusing, and infinitely sad, and everyone on board understood. Emilie wept uncontrollably, and even Mme. Devillieus could find no motto or saying that could lend perspective to the grim tableau of misery and death through which they sailed.

