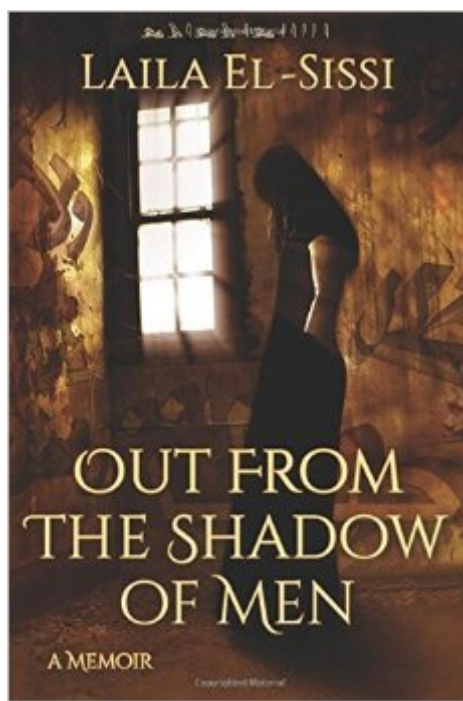


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# Out From The Shadow Of Men



## Synopsis

“The shadow of a man is better than a roof over the head.” This Arabic proverb has long described the plight of women in Egypt. Like the classic Pyramids of Giza, the culture of Egypt for the most part stands unchanged. Egyptian men continue to use the banner of Islam and antiquated interpretation of the Quran to justify controlling women. Egyptian women continue to believe God has ordered men to do so. Yet Laila El-Sissi broke the pattern. Forty years ago, when Laila, a shy and malleable 15-year-old, and her more rebellious 16-year-old sister Rawyia learn that they are betrothed to men they have never met, they refuse to live in the prison constructed by their society, hoping for a better life than that of their mothers and aunts. Running from their tyrannical father, an abusive brother, and arranged marriages to men twice their age, Laila and Rawyia risk their reputation and safety, and plot their escape. *Out from the Shadow of Men* tells the story of two sisters as they find the courage and *joie de vivre* to risk their lives and stand up to forces seemingly as large, strong and ancient as the pyramids so they can choose their futures. At its heart it is the account of two brave, intelligent girls not content to have their lives ruled by others – not even their father. It is a testament to the power of a sister, someone to stand by your side and help you realize your dreams. Rich in details of the everyday lives of middle and upper class families in Egypt, this memoir reveals what life was like – and still is like today – for Egyptian girls and women. It exposes their subjugation, lack of autonomy, and battles with the antiquated marriage laws from which they have no recourse. The book covers the following areas: EGYPT’S FAMILY CULTURE, CHILD MARRIAGE, ROLE OF WOMEN IN EGYPT, MARRIAGE DIVORCE IN ISLAM, FAMILY ABUSE IN MIDDLE EAST, FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION, WOMEN EMPOWERMENT. Written in the pitch perfect voice of 15-year-old Laila as she struggles to understand the unfair world she was born into, her story is more poignant and relevant now than ever as the “Arab Spring” and the atrocity of ISIL crimes committed against women, continues to spread across the Middle East and a growing number of women in this region fight for freedom. Despite recent laws giving women greater (though still unequal) rights, the Egypt of today is not very different from that of the 1960s. Arranged (or forced) child marriages remain common not only in the Middle East but also in Southeast Asia and Africa and among families from those regions who have emigrated to the West. Worldwide, millions of such marriages occur every year. The current revolution in Arab world has brought Islamists into power and introduced new threats to the few improvements made a decade ago. Women’s rights and freedoms are still under serious attack in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and Syria and changes will come very slowly, if ever. The majority of recently released fiction or nonfiction books about Muslim women are set in either Iran or Afghanistan. They leave Egyptian culture and the related

Arab culture virtually unexplored.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I get great pleasure from seeing this book "on the shelf" - a marvelous story of the hard hand of an old-line Muslim father as he attempts to hold his modernized daughters in his traditions and customs. "Out From the Shadows" is a story of love, distrust, struggle, and loss - and the related suspense and abuse - that insists on the next chapter, the next and the next. Ms. El-Sissi is more than her biography above. She is a story teller of charm and wit, and I found this book completely engaging from the first to the last page. Her life - tragic at times, heroic at others - is exposed in her memoir in striking, unbelievable detail, and provides we readers with an insight we've not yet had. My perceptions regarding humanity are enhanced from the reading.

We are very lucky to have Laila El-Sissi living right here in the South Bay Area. Laila is the author of *Out from the Shadow of Men, A Memoir*. She chronicles her life growing up in a very strict Muslim house in Egypt back in the '60s and '70s. For us native Westerners, it's a fascinating look at what it was like for Laila and her older sister. We simply don't have any idea the kind of inequality and inequity that young women faced in this kind of home. In fact, if you talk to Laila about it, much has gone unchanged in the last 40-50 years. Laila focuses on her teenage years. There is an old Arabic proverb that goes: "Better a shadow of a man, than a shade of a wall." And here is a blurb from the book that says: "The Arabic proverb has long described the plight of women in Egypt. Like the

classic Pyramids of Giza, the culture of Egypt for the most part stands unchanged. Egyptian men continue to use the banner of Islam to justify controlling women. Laila and her sister Rawyia find the courage and joie de vivre to risk their lives and stand up to forces seemingly as large, strong and ancient as the pyramids so they can choose their future."Ellen Bass, author of *The Courage to Heal*, says: "Some books are important. Some books you can't put down. *Out from the Shadow of Men* is both..." I have to agree with Ellen's assessment. This book is like the movie *Selma* that I recently saw. That movie is a must-see. And Laila's book is a must-read. If you want to know how it was for a teenage girl to grow up in an ultra-conservative Islamic home, then *Out from the Shadow of Men* is for you. Local book clubs - think about adding this one to your lists. I think Laila might be available to attend a few of your meetings.

If you are looking for a story of true romance, punctuated with heartbreak, then this is the story for you. This book's value, however, goes far beyond being an engrossing memoir. It cuts right to the heart of the mental pathology which drives the violence of so much of the Moslem world. Yeah, I said it! For this, you could not have a better eye-level, firsthand and personal account than that of Laila El-Sissi. She vividly describes a culture in which corrupted pride can trump the most fundamental love that any father should have for his daughter, or any brother for his sister, to the point that these are willing to savage the very ones they should most cherish and protect just for the sake of their delicate masculine egos. This is a tale that should be read, not just by romantics, but by world leaders trying to understand the dynamics of Middle East culture, a culture which licenses, under legal sanction no less, the aberrant pathology manifesting in fathers treating their own daughters like property, to be auctioned off as virtual sex slaves, to men who are themselves often old enough to be their fathers, all under the rubric of marriage and tradition. You can't cure a mental illness if you can't even discuss the etiology of that illness. Ms. El-Sissi has opened the door for that discussion.

*Out From the Shadow of Men* is the most enthralling book I have read in a long, long time. I couldn't put down this well-written memoir. I was in Alexandria, Egypt, and Laila's dilemma from the first page. I felt like I was on the same brave journey as the two spunky sisters. Page after page I was inspired by the ingenuity of the two very different protagonists, Laila and Rawyia. Against incredible familial and cultural obstacles the young girls scheme to shape their own destinies. I loved everything about the book--The format, cover, chapter divisions and especially the unique and delightful way the author has of expressing herself and showing her growth. I hope the author will

soon delight us with the next part of her life. Her story has universal appeal. a terrific writer.

Riveting. The world for females in midcentury Egypt is revealed. More so, the desire of young teens to find the meaning of love is a desire that all women understand o matter where they live.. Our curiosity is with Laila and her sister as they hide women's magazines under their mattress and as they endure the horrific punishments of their Father for committing what he considered a sin of dress or speech. . Their love for their Mother, their younger siblings and their need for a sibling they can trust to help them escape from an arranged marriage to friends of their Father. It is an important book that helps the west to understand growing up in a Muslim family, and the inner strength of women to escape their fate, reach another country and ultimately find a happy life. I don't know of many women in the west who would have the courage to do what Laila and her sister did. It is a hard book to put down.

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