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The Suez canal, that mighty stream  
A man-made water-way!—the dream  
of emperors and tsars and kings  
and mighty sheiks (and underlings)  
was not a simple digging job.  
From coast to coast and over aeons  
the work would start, the work would stop  
and complicated plans were scrapped  
as unions squabbled, slaves were sacked  
or foreign powers met and signed  
in triplicate the forms that put this mammoth job on ice  
—that put the Suez on the shelf  
not once, not even twice, but thrice.

You'll agree it's not a bad idea  
to cut the road from there to here  
and make the journey less banal.  
For this we needed: A Canal!

The idea of an aqua trench  
first reared its head  
(we smelled the stench)  
'round eighteen hundred-odd BC  
when Pharaoh Senusert the Three  
dug 'tween Red Sea and the Nile  
a ditch that lasted for a while.

And so by navigating right  
and turning left into the white  
bit of the tribut'ree,  
a buccaneer could steer his junk  
from Spain or France or Italy  
and end up quite efficiently  
upon the other side, you see.

However, as is oft the case  
the maintenance was not pursued,  
the trench not dredged, rent overdue.  
First ship, then boat and then canoe  
could not get past, could not get through.  
And by the time of Rome you know  
the stream was just a memory.

Now kids—according to my version  
the next attempt was by a Persian  
a chap called Darius the One –  
around 500 he begun  
repairs that were well-funded  
by gold and silver he had plundered  
from all across his vast empire  
his reconstruction meant entire  
fleets of tugs and boats of rubber  
could get from one side to the other  
in four days flat or even flatter  
T'was I heard—quite the regatta.

But as we learn from history  
the plans of mice and men, and me  
are laid aside, are sunk at sea  
and fade away as entropy  
sets in, not even Ptolemy  
could stop decay,  
and our canal did fade away.

Fast forward, now, two thousand years  
Napoleon, to mighty cheers  
declared a Suez all anew  
commissioned engineers who drew  
up maps and surveys, techy charts  
the sort you need before you start.  
But all his learned men did say,  
Napoleon, you must now stop  
The waters of the south did not  
match up—they were too tall.  
And so—alas—the project stalls.  
The emperor, though, gives it the gong  
although we now know he was wrong.

More recent trials to dig it moved  
along more smoothly, much improved

by modern ways of shifting soil  
and plumbing depths by burning oil.  
This time—round 1855  
the dream was once again revived  
by Monsieur Ferdinand Lesseps.  
The way he did it, step-by-step  
was first to float a corporation  
(investments flowed from ev'ry nation)  
and through combin-ed expertise  
was born the Su-ez Company.

One great Egypt tradition paved  
the way for cheap construction—saved  
a ton of cash  
(we're talking slaves).

But forced employment soon got banned  
and wages grew,  
the project spanned  
eleven years, it cost a bomb  
and Lesseps soon felt that he was wrong  
to have begun with so much trouble  
(his budget bloomed to almost double).

Yet finally by '69 the job was shut,  
the tools were downed,  
the ribbon cut.  
The trading route  
was opened up!  
And Africa—the southern bit  
was waiting for the Euro ships  
to sail right in  
and conquer it.

Now here the tale gets more complex  
the players multiple and vexed.  
There's Britain, France, United States,  
Egypt and its many mates  
and even little Israel  
(we know that story's hard to tell)...  
one might step in, another ousting.  
Let's say it simply, on one hand  
that this bit of contested land  
(and water) was altogether too damned hot  
(those trade routes sure are worth a lot!)  
So war, and soldiers-rank-and-file  
descended on the sorry Nile.  
This once-proud colony of Isis,  
embroiled within the Suez Crisis.

From 19 hundred and 56  
the Suez floundered, flopped and flipped  
sometimes it opened, sometimes closed.  
Events conspired to cut the flow  
of water, boats and thus of trade.  
Would once again the toil of spade  
and shovel, pick, pneumatic tools  
be foiled by humans, bloody fools?

As luck would have it (more or less)  
the push of economic 'need'  
was just too strong, and hungry greed  
for global swap of currency  
rode roughshod over—nicely hobbling  
that internationalistic squabbling.

Thus since the middle seventies  
the proud Suez is off its knees  
no longer stuck in darkened age  
it's off the shelf, it's turned the page.  
Our ships can travel all okay.  
They get across within a day!  
By now there is no problem see,  
the flows of capital are free  
to ride untrammelled 'cross the sands  
and link up cash from many lands.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a  
story by Lucas Ihlein.*