The Pearl Diver

*(extract) by Julia Johnson*

Already he could swim like a fish, and he had been secretly practising holding his breath and slowly blowing out a stream of bubbles under the water. He wanted his father to be proud of him! It was said that Abdullah was one of the best divers. Saeed had heard the stories of how long his father could stay under the water, of how many oysters he could harvest, and of how deep he could dive. Only one man in twenty, it was said, could go deeper than sixteen fathoms. Saeed knew that the Nakhuda was happy to have his father on board because it increased his chances of finding a really special pearl. Those found in deeper water were supposed to have a finer lustre. The crew, too, would rejoice in a valuable catch, for they would receive a share of the profits. “But aren’t you ever afraid, Father?” Saeed had asked. “You must learn the ways of the sea, my son, and know its secrets, “Abdullah had replied. Saeed had wondered what he meant. “And I have Ahmed to look out for me,” he added, “he is a good hauler and I trust him as if he were my brother.”

Every diver had a hauler, and Saeed knew that the relationship between them was a very close one. The diver depended on his hauler to pull him from the sea as fast as possible when he tugged on the rope to let him know that he was ready to surface.

Saeed turned now to see the men raising the huge white sails. The wind filled them, and the sambuk gathered speed. All around him other boats flew over the sea. Saeed thought they looked like a great flock of big white birds. And in their wake dolphins leapt and dived. This was a sign of good fortune. Saeed felt happy.