



Reader's Guide



Jokes for the Gunmen Mazen Maarouf

Translated by Jonathan Wright

Granta

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About the author	Mazen Maarouf was born in Beirut, Lebanon, in January 1978. He is a Palestinian-Icelandic writer, poet, translator and journalist. He has published three poetry collections and two short-story collections. He currently lives between Reykjavik and Beirut.
About the translator	Jonathan Wright was born in Andover, UK, in December 1953. He is a British journalist and literary translator. He joined Reuters news agency in 1980 as a correspondent, and was based in the Middle East for several decades. He turned to literary translation from Arabic to English in 2008 and has since translated more than a dozen novels or short-story collections, winning several prizes. He lives in London.
About the book	A brilliant collection of fictions in the vein of Roald Dahl, Etgar Keret and Amy Hempel. These are stories of what the world looks like from a child's pure, but sometimes vengeful or muddled, perspective. These are stories of life in a war zone, life peppered by surreal mistakes, tragic accidents and painful encounters. These are stories of fantasist matadors, lost limbs and voyeuristic dwarfs. This is a collection about sex, death and the all-important skill of making life into a joke. These are unexpected stories by a very fresh voice. These stories are unforgettable.
What the judges thought	'A beautifully textured and absurdist gaze on human inventiveness and defiance in the midst of war's traumas.'
Discussion points	<p>What did you think of the use of child narrators in the collection? Does it add an innocence to the topics or make them seem even darker?</p> <p>Maarouf uses dark humour to try to make sense of war-torn Lebanon – how did this make you feel?</p> <p>The 12 stories are all quite different – did you have a favourite?</p> <p>Have you read other books set in Lebanon? How did they compare to <i>Jokes for the Gunmen</i>?</p> <p>This is an unsettling collection, which doesn't shy away from loss and horror; discuss the importance of this kind of writing.</p>
Themed reading	<p><i>All That Man Is</i> by David Szalay Nine men. Each of them at a different stage of life, each of them away from home. Tracing an arc from the spring of youth to the winter of old age, this short story collection shows the men to be ludicrous and inarticulate, shocking and despicable, pitiable and hilarious.</p> <p><i>Moth Smoke</i> by Mohsin Hamid In Lahore, Daru is a junior banker with a hashish habit. When his old friend Ozi moves back to Pakistan, with his beautiful family and lavish lifestyle, Daru wants to be happy for him, but he descends into jealousy, and his life unravels. How far will he fall and what will he lose?</p> <p><i>De Niro's Game</i> by Rawi Hage Bassam and George are childhood best friends, growing up in war-torn Beirut. Now on the verge of adulthood, they must choose their futures: to remain in the exhausted, corrupt city of their birth, or to go into exile abroad, cut off from the only existence they have known.</p> <p><i>Beirut, I Love You: A Memoir</i> by Zena el Khalil This is the story of Zena, and the city she calls home. In the streets, armed militias prowl, while ragged construction workers rebuild the city. Refugees sleep five to a bed as bleach-blondes find their way to the newest supernightclub. And at any moment, the bombs will start falling.</p>
Useful links	<p>Extract from <i>Jokes for the Gunmen</i> in <i>Granta</i></p> <p>Mazen Maarouf: Hand Made, A Documentary</p> <p>Mazen Maarouf: Six Poems</p> <p><i>Jokes for the Gunmen</i> by Mazen Maarouf review – strange tales from dark places in <i>The Guardian</i></p> <p><i>Jokes for the Gunmen</i> review: unsettling debut mixes humour and war in <i>The Irish Times</i></p>