

# **Men in the Sun and Other Palestinian Stories Study Guide**

**Men in the Sun and Other Palestinian Stories by  
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# Men in the Sun

## Men in the Sun Summary

Abu Qais feels the throbbing of the damp earth as he lies there; it smells like his wife's hair when it is wet after a bath. He recalls hearing the teacher, Ustaz Selim, say that the Tigris and Euphrates meet to form the Shatt al-Arab river while he was eavesdropping at the window. Ustaz Selim could not say prayers because he was not an imam. He died before the village fell into the hands of the Jews. Abu Qais' son, Qais, asks his father about the Shatt al-Arab river. Abu Qais learns that his wife, Umm Qais, is pregnant and wants him to call Umm Umar. He feels alien and insignificant; he does not even own his home. His friend Saad arrives and wants him to move across the river to Kuwait where there is a better life and better schools for his children. It is a difficult journey and will cost fifteen dinars to smuggle him, not to mention risking his life. Abu Qais throws himself on the earth to think.

Assad talks to the fat proprietor who smuggles people from Basra to Kuwait; he is asking fifteen dinars. Assad agrees to pay upon arrival because he has been smuggled before and Abul-Abd had lied and left him on the road. The proprietor refuses and says he must pay before they leave, promising to get Assad to Kuwait. The guide will not run away because he escorts ten people. Assad borrows the money from his uncle who only agrees so that Assad can marry Nada, his uncle's daughter, sooner. Unfortunately, Assad does not want to marry Nada. Assad remembers when he was stranded after Abul-Abd deserted him. A blonde woman and her husband pick him up and bring him to Basra. The husband realizes that Assad is trying to escape and takes him to Baghdad. Assad stays in the Shatt Hotel in Basra. The proprietor tells him the journey will begin in two days.

Marwan cannot afford fifteen dinars so he leaves the proprietor in despair, thinking that he will find a different smuggler. He quickly returns and threatens to report the proprietor to the police. After the proprietor slaps Marwan, Marwan leaves and wanders the streets hopelessly. He feels a hand on his shoulder, and Abul Khaizuran introduces himself. Abul Khaizuran tells Marwan not to despair because the proprietor is a well-known thief. Marwan admits his desire to escape to Kuwait. Marwan thinks about waking early this morning to write a long letter to his mother. Marwan does not hate his father because he left his mother and children after Marwan's brother, Zakaria, stopped sending money to the family. His father's friend, Shafiqa's father, suggested marrying the deformed Shafiqa for financial security. Abul Khaizuran rebukes Marwan for thinking so long and hard and offers to take him to Kuwait for five dinars, which is all Marwan can afford. He will even wait for payment until they arrive in Kuwait, but Marwan must help Abul Khaizuran find others who want to go to Kuwait. Marwan knows of a man in his hotel who also wants to go. Abul Khaizuran leaves after arranging to meet again the next day. Marwan wants to go to Kuwait to work, like his brother did. His brother stopped sending money because he got married. Marwan has always hated his brother but not his father



because his father still loves his children. Before he leaves, Marwan visits his father who gives him ten dinars as Shafiqa prays for Marwan's safe and successful journey.

Marwan brings Assad to his meeting with Abul Khaizuran who brings Abu Qais. These are enough men for their journey. Assad negotiates the details of their arrangement for Marwan and Abu Qais; he wants to know the details of how Abul Khaizuran will smuggle them to Kuwait and what he will charge. The men agree with Abul Khaizuran's charge of ten dinars each. Abul Khaizuran explains that he drives a licensed lorry across the frontier for Haj Rida; he plans to put the men inside the water tank. Assad, Marwan and Abu Qais worry about complications. They would rather go through the desert with a guide, but Abul Khaizuran dissuades them. Assad suggests that Abul Khaizuran and Haj Rida are involved in smuggling together, and although he smiles, Abul Khaizuran does not respond. Assad, Marwan and Abu Qais agree to the arrangement. Abul Khaizuran will sound the horn in the morning for them to leave.

During their journey, Assad, Marwan and Abu Qais take turns sitting in the shade. Abul Khaizuran compares the one hundred, fifty kilometers of road between Basra and Kuwait to the path to heaven or hell after death. When Assad asks if Abul Khaizuran ever married, Abul Khaizuran flashes back to the war and losing his manhood. Assad allows him to change the subject without answering so Abul Khaizuran tells horror stories about smugglers who lie to their clients and say that remote villages are Kuwait. Abul Khaizuran smuggles because he wants more money. As they approach the first customs station in Safwan, Abul Khaizuran hides Assad, Marwan and Abu Qais in the water tank, advising them to take off their shirts because it is hot. The ride in the lorry is very unsteady. Abul Khaizuran realizes how awful the weather is as he passes quickly through customs at Safwan. He stops a short distance from the customs station to release the men from the tank. The men look nearly dead and they were only in the tank for six minutes. Abul Khaizuran tells them to hurry since there is another post soon; they will be able to rest when they stop, not before. The men are quietly lost in their own thoughts as they continue their journey. Abul Khaizuran changes his mind and decides that this is hell. He does not travel at night because the patrols are more likely to search the lorry then.

The journey is halfway over. Abul Khaizuran promises to put on a grand lunch for Assad, Marwan and Abu Qais when they arrive in Kuwait. As they approach the next customs station in Mutlaa, the men hide in the tank again, and Abul Khaizuran promises that it will take seven minutes at the most. At the customs station in Mutlaa, Abu Baqir delays Abul Khaizuran by asking him about Kawkab, a dancer that he heard about from Haj Rida. He wants Abul Khaizuran to tell him the story; in lieu of this, Abul Khaizuran agrees to take Abu Baqir to Basra to meet Kawkab the next time he travels this way. Abul Khaizuran rushes away, worried for the men because they have been locked in the tank for nearly an hour. He is angry that Abu Baqir talked so much. As he reaches the lorry and hurries away from the customs station, Abul Khaizuran calls the men but receives no answer. He opens the tank to find that the men are all dead. He drives away from the city, planning to bury them in the desert, but he changes his mind and dumps the bodies by the municipality trash heap. As Abul Khaizuran drives away, he mourns his companions, wishing they had banged on the sides of the tank.



## Men in the Sun Analysis

The fact that the Abu Qais thinks about the Tigris and Euphrates meeting to form the Shatt al-Arab river foreshadows the importance of the river in the story and the smuggling. Ustaz Selim's inability to say prayers because he is not an imam shows the religious implications of the events occurring. The fact that the village fell into the hands of the Jews provides background information about the war. Since Abu Qais does not even own his home, it is evident that he is nearly destitute which makes him hopeless as well. Saad's suggestion that Abu Qais move to Kuwait gives new hope and foreshadows Abu Qais' attempt to be smuggled out of Basra. His despair and confusion are obvious when he throws himself onto the ground. Assad's previous experience with Abul-Abd provides background information as well as acquainting the reader with the justly earned reputation of smugglers. Assad does not want to marry Nada but he needs his uncle to loan him the money to be smuggled to Kuwait; his life is filled with unpleasant options.

Abul Khaizuran introduces himself to Marwan shortly after Marwan's encounter with the fat smuggler, foreshadowing Abul Khaizuran's offer. Even Abul Khaizuran confirms the bad reputation that smugglers have which is ironic since he is offering to smuggle Marwan. Marwan's love for his father foreshadows his visit to his father and Shafiqa. The fact that his father left his mother for Shafiqa for financial securities demonstrates the extreme destitution that predominates in Basra. Abul Khaizuran's offer to take Marwan to Kuwait for five dinars and to wait for payment until he arrives in Kuwait shows that he is kind and honest. Marwan knows of a man in his hotel who also wants to go to Kuwait; this foreshadows Assad joining the journey. Assad negotiates the deal because of his experience. Abul Khaizuran explains the plan, but Assad, Marwan and Abu Qais worry about complications which is ironic and foreshadows their deaths. The agreement to the arrangement foreshadows the journey.

Assad, Marwan and Abu Qais take turns sitting in the shade which is evidence of the extreme heat. It is ironic and foreboding that Abul Khaizuran compares the road between Basra and Kuwait to the road to heaven or hell. Abul Khaizuran's reminiscence of losing his manhood refers back to the war. It is ironic that he tells horror stories about the dishonesty of smugglers. Ironically, he changes his mind a short time later and determines that this is hell, not the road to heaven or hell. This also negates any hope in the form of heaven. The realization of how awful the weather is, along with the fact that the men look nearly dead after ascending from the water tank when they leave Safwan, foreshadows the deaths of Assad, Marwan and Abu Qais. Abul Khaizuran again proves his kindness by his promise to put on a grand lunch for Assad, Marwan and Abu Qais when they arrive in Kuwait. Several things foreshadow the deaths of Marwan, Assad and Abu Qais in the last section of this story: Abul Khaizuran's promise that it will only take seven minutes to pass through customs, Abu Baqir delaying Abul Khaizuran, Abul Khaizuran's worry as he rushes back to the lorry and Abul Khaizuran calling to the men without receiving a response. Since Abul Khaizuran is an eunuch, it is ironic that Abu Baqir delays Abul Khaizuran in Mutlaa by insinuating a sexual relationship between Abul Khaizuran and Kawkab, a dancer. Abul Khaizura finds the men dead, fulfilling the



foreshadowing that occurs throughout the story. It is ironic that he wishes the men had banged on the sides of the tank since he would have gotten in trouble, but it shows his good nature and kindness.



# The Land of the Sad Oranges

## The Land of the Sad Oranges Summary

There is nothing unusual about moving to Acre or about their time in Acre. Then the Jews attack in Acre, and the recipient of the story's family, along with the narrator, is forced to pack all of their belongings and flee in haste the next morning. On their way out of Acre, they stop at an orange grove where the women buy oranges. As the mother hands an orange to the father, he cries, staring at the orange. At Ras Naquora, the lorry stops beside many other lorries, and the men relinquish their weapons. As the mother looks silently at the orange, the narrator cries. They reach Sidon in the afternoon. The father is in a rage, and the narrator believes that he is silently cursing the narrator's father. The narrator doubts the existence of a compassionate God. They dread the night because they will have to sleep on the streets. Fate in the form of the recipient's uncle finds them. He came to Sidon first and entered the house of a Jewish family, demanding their house; the family gave him a room where the narrator and the recipient's family join the uncle and his family for three nights. The narrator does not know where the father got the money, but he finds money to move his family and the narrator to a village on the outskirts of Sidon. The father is happy for a while.

On May fifteenth, the Arab army enters Palestine. The father rouses the children to accompany him, chasing and cheering after the army. He throws cigarettes to the soldiers. After that, it is slow for a while. The father sends the children to climb the nearby hills every morning in order to distract them from thinking about breakfast and their hunger. Complications arise, and the father is easily angered. One day, a small request sets him off. A diabolical thought seizes him, and he digs through a chest that he has brought from Acre. The mother tells the children to run to the mountains, but the children peer in the window instead. The father wants to kill the children and himself, ending all of their pain and suffering. He falls silent and lies on the floor, weeping. The children do not understand, but the narrator begins to comprehend the father's intentions when he sees the revolver thrown on the floor. The narrator runs to the mountains, leaving his childhood behind him. After that, life ceased to be pleasant. He returns at dusk to find the father still ill with the mother nursing him. The recipient also leaves childhood behind that day. The orange is dried up and shriveled.

## The Land of the Sad Oranges Analysis

The characters in this story are very vague; no one is given a name. It is written in the first person and addressed to another person simply referred to as "you." The manner in which the narrator refers to the recipient's family provides evidence that they are not related, or least that the narrator is not related by blood to the recipient's father. The narrator refers to his father being gone, but it is not clear whether his father died, abandoned him, or is at war. The relinquishing of weapons at Ras Naquora foreshadows the father's hidden revolver. The Jews are antagonists in this story who



attack the family's home and displace them to another village. The narrator makes it apparent that he is confused about where the father obtained money in order to procure them a house on the outskirts of Sidon, suggesting that it was not obtained legally or morally. The army marching through the town rouses the father's good spirits, but their departure sinks him into a deep depression, increased by his inability to feed the children. The father's desire to kill the children and himself demonstrates how intensely bad their situation has become. The narrator's innocence is destroyed with the realization of how negative their situation truly is. Throughout the story, the orange represents Acre and is a symbol of dreams and happy times. The father weeps after the mother buys the orange, the mother stares at the orange as the narrator cries, and finally, at the end of the story when the father is desolate and the narrator has realized their situation, the orange is shriveled and dried up, representing the ruin hope of a happy future.





# If You Were a Horse

## If You Were a Horse Summary

Father always tells his son that he wishes his son were a horse so he could put a bullet through his brain. Father only says it to his son, no one else. The son believes his father hates him and horses, but with time, he abandons this idea after learning that his father used to love horses. One day, when his father is very happy, his son asks him why he says such a thing. His father replies that sometimes it is necessary to kill a horse. The son asks if his father hates him, but his father assures him that he does not hate him; he is afraid of him. The son loves his father who suddenly abandoned everything in the country after his wife died shortly after giving birth to their son. Father sold his horses and moved to the city. The son decides to learn the secret of his father's past. When Father goes to the country to visit his friends, the son opens a drawer and finds a black leather notebook with prices and pedigrees of horses. In the margins, he finds notes concerning a horse named Barq. Father's friends advised him to sell or kill Barq, but Father refuses because Barq is his most treasured possession. The notes say that Barq threw her savagely and crushed her skull with his hooves. Abu Muhammed shot Barq. The son goes to talk to Abu Muhammed who says Father should have killed Barq at birth. Father loved his wife very much, and she is the person referred to in the notes that was killed. Father does not hate his son; he is afraid of his son. Abu Muhammed advises the son not to ask his father why. The son wonders why his father is afraid of him since his surgical patients are not afraid of him; there is nothing in his face to inspire fear.

One night, the son wakes to his father's cries of pain. He recognizes acute appendicitis and takes his father to the hospital. Father learns that he needs an operation which his son will perform, but he refuses to allow his son to perform it. The son shrugs and allows another surgeon to operate. After the operation, the surgeon tells the son that the anesthesia makes his father chatter. Father calls Abu Muhammed an unfeeling, neutral person for killing a horse when the horse's owner cannot. Father blames himself for Barq killing his wife. He talks about a beautiful foal whose birth caused him much joy and excitement, but Abu Muhammed saw the foal and a red patch on its neck which he said is a patch of blood that predicts the horse will kill someone dear to him. Father ignores the superstition and rides Barq peacefully for a long time, wanting to dispel the superstition. After Barq kills his wife, Father becomes very superstitious. In this story, the son finds an explanation for his father's wish that he were a horse; he has a reddish mole on his side. The son knows the medical reasons for such marks, but he begins to wonder why they are located in one place and not another; maybe the superstition is true. Abu Muhammed won when Father tried to disprove the superstition with Barq. Now, Father is battling against the superstition with his son. The son wonders who will win. He begins to fear that the other surgeon killed his father through negligence. If this is true, it is his fault that his father died because he did not insist upon performing the surgery himself when he knew he was more capable. The son runs back to the hospital to check on his father, and the echo of his footsteps sounds like a galloping horse.



## If You Were a Horse Analysis

The fact that Father always tells his son that he wishes his son were a horse so he could put a bullet through his brain foreshadows the reason that he says this. The son's belief that his father hates him and horses is ironic since his father loves both. The fact that Father admits he is afraid of his son shows that he would like to tell his son the reason for his fear. Father abandoning his home in the country shortly after his wife's death foreshadows the discovery of his wife's death being connected to the country. The black leather notebook contains notes which foreshadow the story of Barq and the mother. The mention in the notebook of Abu Muhammed leads the son to Abu Muhammed to discuss his father's fear of him. Abu Muhammed evades the topic but reinforces the fact that Father is afraid of his son. The son wonders why his father is afraid of him when his surgical patients are not, foreshadowing his father's need for a surgeon. It is ironic that he specifically thinks that there is nothing in his face to inspire fear since it is nothing in his face that his father fears; his father fears what is on his side.

Father having acute appendicitis fulfills the foreshadowing that occurred with the mention of the son being a surgeon. Father refuses to allow his son to operate, reiterating his fear of his son and his son killing him. The son's seeming indifference to his father's refusal shows that it hurts him but that he will not force his father into making a decision against his will. The fact that another surgeon operates on Father foreshadows the question of Father dying. Father shows his resentment toward Abu Muhammed by calling him an unfeeling, neutral person. Foreshadowing is fulfilled when Father reveals the superstition that made Abu Muhammed advise him to kill Barq. This causes the son to realize the reason his father wishes he were a horse; he has a reddish mole on his side. The son begins to rationalize his mole but then realizes that maybe superstitions are true. A comparison is made between Father's battle over the superstition with Abu Muhammed and his battle with his son. As the son wonders who will win, he realizes that he does not know if his father is still alive after the surgery. He recognizes the fact that he will be to blame if his father died under the other surgeon's knife because he did not force his father to allow him to perform the operation. The echo of his footsteps resemble a galloping horse and sets a foreboding tone to what he will discover at the hospital.



# A Hand in the Grave

## A Hand in the Grave Summary

Nabil wakes early as his father says his prayers. Father notes that Nabil looks tired and questions if Nabil did not sleep well or was out late. Nabil denies being out late, and his sister confirms it. Sister offers coffee to their father, but Father does not want to be poisoned. Father pursues Nabil about looking tired if he was not out late; Father looks for a reason to release his rage every morning. Nabil replies with a list of medical possibilities, inspiring Father's pride in his son's position in medical school. Father wants to know if Nabil woke early for prayers, but Nabil responds that he plans to rob a grave with Suhail because they need a skeleton to study in school. Sister asks why Nabil wants to upset their father as Nabil dresses and packs his bag. Nabil is not lying. Father calls Nabil a sinner. Nabil and Suhail plan to rob a grave because neither of them can afford the seventy-five lire it costs to buy a skeleton. Nabil packs a shovel in his pack and leaves. Nabil meets Suhail who is afraid. Neither of them could persuade their families to give them the money to buy a skeleton so they must rob a grave. Nabil offers to do it alone since Suhail is frightened, but Suhail refuses his offer.

As they go to the graveyard, Nabil has a problem breathing and his heart pounds quickly. When Suhail hesitates, Nabil offers to give up their scheme. Suhail states he will go alone, putting on a show of false bravery. Suhail chooses a grave as he complains about being unable to obtain the seventy-five lire. Nabil and Suhail work quickly, taking turns digging; both pretend they are not afraid. Before expanding the hole, they decide to make sure the skeleton is in the grave. Since Suhail does not want to put his hand in the hole to check, Nabil feels inside but cannot reach the bottom. Because Suhail is thinner, he strives for the skeleton. Suddenly, Suhail screams and pulls his hand out, cutting his hand and arm on the sides of the hold. He claims that he stuck his fingers in its eyes, but Nabil says that is impossible since the skeleton is fifty years old. In reality, first year medical students are not required to obtain a skeleton, but Nabil and Suhail want to feel like real students. Suhail raves to the other students about the skeleton, eventually being declared insane and expelled. Nabil transfers to the school of law after realizing that he cannot stand the sight of a skeleton. Ironically, Suhail's uncle had planned to give him the money after he was unable to rob a grave. Nabil's father says they got what they deserved. Seven years later, Nabil learns that the graveyard is really a plot of land where a Turkish peasant had hid wheat and flour during a famine.

## A Hand in the Grave Analysis

Father's religious affinity foreshadows his belief that the grave is that of a saint. The fact that Nabil looks tired shows that he is not comfortable with his decision to rob a grave. Father's pride in his son's medical knowledge demonstrates the importance of his son's education to the man. Since Father looks for a reason to release his rage every



morning, it can be inferred that he is not happy. Nabil tells his father that he plans to rob a grave because he cannot afford to buy a skeleton; this is clearly a hint to his father to give him the money which his father either does not notice or completely ignores. The shovel in Nabil's pack foreshadows digging in the grave. Nabil and Suhail are both afraid, yet they feign courage and urge the other to complete their act. Suhail's complaint that they could not obtain seventy-five lire shows his discontent with their proceedings. They show intelligence in making sure a skeleton is in the grave before expanding the hole any further. Suhail's declaration that he stuck his fingers in the corpse's eyes is irrational since a skeleton that is over fifty years old would no longer have eyes. This also foreshadows there being a mystery to the graveyard. Suhail's irrationality persists to the point of being declared insane and expelled from medical school. Ironically, Suhail and Nabil do not actually need a skeleton; they simply desire to feel like a part of the school. Also ironically, Nabil transfers to law school since he cannot stand the sight of a skeleton. Seven years after their grave robbing attempt, Nabil learns the secret of the graveyard, fulfilling the earlier foreshadowing.



# Umm Saad

## Umm Saad Summary

Umm Saad lives with the narrator's family for many years in al-Ghabasiya before she moves to the camps, but she still visits the narrator, her cousin, every Tuesday. She is a very strong woman. One day, Umm Saad visits and tells her cousin that Saad, her son, has joined the fedayeen, a company of guerillas. The narrator notes Umm Saad's sorrow. Saad does not tell Umm Saad that he is leaving; he simply leaves. Umm Saad is not surprised, but she wants to tell her cousin about it. She is very tired. She wonders if the commander will give Saad a machine gun, and her cousin affirms it. Umm Saad says children are slavery, because she would follow Saad if she did not have two other children. She debates visiting Saad, but her cousin tells her that guerilla soldiers have no need for mothers. Umm Saad seems disappointed that mother can be dispensed with so easily. She asks whether she should ask the commander to keep an eye on Saad. Her cousin tells her that doing so would mean asking the commander to keep Saad from danger and war, but Saad and his companions want to go to war immediately. After a moment of perplexity and torment, Umm Saad asks her cousin to tell the commander to let Saad do what he wants. If he wants to go to war, his commander should send him.

## Umm Saad Analysis

The background information of the story does not reveal the narrator's relationship to Umm Saad, but she reveals it when she appears at his house and addresses him as "cousin." The story is filled with conflicting images of Umm Saad; her cousin sees her as strong, then sad, followed by tired, and finally confused. Umm Saad shows an interesting condition of motherhood, the favoritism of one child over others. She sees her other two children as slavery that prevents her from following Saad. Umm Saad seems resolved to support her son. She is not surprised about Saad joining the fedayeen; she only wants to share the information. She will not visit him if fedayeen soldiers do not need their mothers. If Saad wants to go to war, Umm Saad is offended that the commander does not send him immediately.



# The Falcon

## The Falcon Summary

The narrator works at the New Construction Company as an engineer, which is a different class than the guards, Jadaan and Mubarak. Jadaan does not bother remembering the engineers' names and calls them all Abdallah. The guards are Bedouins from the desert. Jadaan despises Mubarak, while Mubarak is ashamed around Jadaan. Mubarak asks Abdallah to write a complaint for him against Jadaan because Jadaan refuses to clean the bathrooms, though it is one of his responsibilities. He used to pay Abdallah's servant to do it, but now that the servant refuses, Jadaan offers to pay Mubarak to clean the bathrooms. Jadaan is there to sit, not to work. Mubarak, who believes that Jadaan fled from his people, shares the rumor that Jadaan falls in love with a red-haired woman while hunting gazelle by order of the sheikh. The woman falls in love with Jadaan as well but will not marry him. Jadaan divorces his wife and becomes a guard, stating that a man may sit anywhere in the world. He just wants to sit at the New Construction Company and die there peacefully. Abdallah walks away from Mubarak without writing his complaint.

Abdallah looks for an opportunity to talk to Jadaan and finally asks Jadaan's advice about hunting gazelle. Jadaan tells him to chase the gazelle with a car and catch them like a chicken; using a gun to hunt gazelle is a disgrace. Jadaan admits that he was a hunter twenty years ago. He has a falcon named Nar which was the best falcon in his tribe. One day, Jadaan lifts the hood from Nar's eyes, and Nar finds a gazelle and circles it several times before perching in a tree. The gazelle follows Nar and rests under the same tree. Jadaan believes that Nar does not want to hunt that day, but Nar refuses to eat for a week. The gazelle nuzzles Jadaan when he tries to feed Nar. One morning, Jadaan wakes to find Nar lying on the ground beneath his perch and the gazelle gone. The gazelle joins his people to die because gazelles like to die among their people, but falcons do not care where they die.

## The Falcon Analysis

Abdallah specifies that engineers and guards are considered two separate classes at the New Construction Company. Jadaan calls all of the engineers Abdallah, showing his indifference to the people around him. He further shows his indifference to his job by his refusal to clean the bathrooms. This annoys Mubarak who asks Abdallah to write a complaint for him. Mubarak shares the rumor of Jadaan and the red-haired woman with Abdallah, creating Abdallah's curiosity about Jadaan. Abdallah's curiosity, along with his unwillingness to write the complaint for Mubarak, foreshadows his attempts to talk to Jadaan. Abdallah asks Jadaan for advice about hunting gazelle since the rumor about Jadaan involved meeting the red-haired woman while hunting gazelle. Jadaan then tells the story of his falcon, Nar. Nar's death and Jadaan's explanation that falcons do not

care where they die serve to compare Jadaan to a falcon since he has come to the New Construction Company to sit quietly and die peacefully, like Nar did on his perch.



# Letter from Gaza

## Letter from Gaza Summary

The narrator writes a letter to his friend Mustafa. He acknowledges receiving Mustafa's letter which states that everything is prepared for the narrator to stay in Sacramento. The narrator also receives a letter of acceptance from the department of Civil Engineering at the University of California. Unfortunately, the narrator has changed his mind. He is upset that their lives will not continue to follow the same course as he remembers Mustafa's reminder of their vow as he flew to Sacramento from Cairo airport. Mustafa and the narrator grow up together in the Shajiya quarter of Gaza. They move to Kuwait and save money to relocate to California. Mustafa receives a contract with the Ministry of Education in Kuwait and gives money to the narrator to support his mother, his brother's widow and her four children. The narrator feels that Mustafa is unhappy at his departure, and Mustafa cries as he leaves his lifelong friend. The Ministry of Education gives the narrator a contract, and his life consists of a gluey feeling.

When the Jews bomb Gaza in the middle of the year, the narrator plans to flee to California and prepares for his departure. First, he decides to visit his mother's house where his brother's widow asks him to visit Nadia, his thirteen-year-old niece, in the hospital. The narrator buys a pound of apples and visits Nadia though he realizes that there is something strange going on that his mother and sister-in-law are not telling him. Nadia seems like a tortured saint lying in her hospital bed. She asks her uncle if he has come to visit her from Kuwait. He tells her that he has and that he has brought her a present. He lies and says that he bought her the red trousers that she had asked him to buy for her. Nadia begins to weep as she lifts the coverlet, revealing her amputated leg. The narrator leaves his niece in silent derision, but now he sees a new Gaza which needs to be reclaimed. He learns that Nadia lost her leg during the bombing when she threw herself across her younger brothers and sisters rather than running away and saving herself. The narrator will not go to Sacramento, but he begs Mustafa to return to Gaza to relearn what life and existence is worth.

## Letter from Gaza Analysis

The letter to Mustafa begins by detailing the narrator's plans to join Mustafa in Sacramento but quickly declares that the narrator has changed his mind; the rest of the story explains why the narrator has changed his mind. The background information provided about the narrator and Mustafa growing up together and moving to Kuwait together demonstrates how close the pair are and presents their vow to continue their life along the same path. The gluey feeling that the narrator gets while under contract with the Ministry of Education in Kuwait reveals his discontent. The bombing of Gaza further spurns the narrator to depart to Sacramento at first, but it eventually is the reason that he decides to stay in Gaza. His visit to his mother's house foreshadows the





reason for the narrator's change of plans. The narrator's feeling that his mother and sister-in-law are not telling him about something strange going on regarding his visit to Nadia in the hospital foreshadows the reason for his change of plans as well. The fact that Nadia seems like a tortured saint in the hospital bed foreshadows the reason for her amputation. Nadia serves as juxtaposition and a foil to the narrator who lies to her about buying her the red trousers that she wanted. The narrator shows himself to be immoral through this act, while Nadia's suffering is the result of a courageous and loving act. The narrator's self-discontent after leaving the hospital explains the reason for his change of plans in joining Mustafa in Sacramento. His desire for Mustafa to return to Gaza demonstrates that he has learned something from his niece and desires Mustafa to learn the same thing. Both need to relearn loyalty, morality and courage, and their tutor will be Nadia, the narrator's thirteen-year-old niece.



# Characters

## Abu Qais appears in Men in the Sun

Abu Qais rests on damp ground while he considers leaving Basra and traveling to Kuwait in order to procure more money and a better education for his children. He has a son, Qais, and his wife bears a daughter as well. He is an older man and worries about the trip. Abul Khaizuran approaches him about smuggling him to Kuwait in the water tank of the lorry that he drives for Haj Rida. Abu Qais meets with Abul Khaizuran, Assad and Marwan to discuss the terms of being smuggled to Kuwait. Assad negotiates with Abul Khaizuran for the other two men. Abu Qais agrees to the conditions and meets Abul Khaizuran, Assad and Marwan the next morning to begin their journey.

On the journey, Abu Qais takes turns with Assad and Marwan riding in the sun and shade. They hide in the water tank of the lorry when they come to the customs station at Safwan. Once Abul Khaizuran passes through Safwan and lets them out of the water tank, they complain about the heat in the tank. Again, they hide in the water tank as they come to the customs station at Mutlaa. Unfortunately, Abul Khaizuran is delayed by Abu Baqir, a customs official. Abu Qais dies in the water tank while they are at Mutlaa. Abul Khaizuran considers burying his body in the desert, but instead he dumps it in Kuwait for the municipality to pick up.

## Assad appears in Men in the Sun

Assad is tricked in the past by a smuggler so he attempts to negotiate with the fat proprietor to pay to be smuggled once he arrives in Kuwait, but the fat proprietor refuses. Assad borrows money from his uncle who loans it to him only so that Assad can marry his cousin, Nada, sooner, but Assad does not want to marry Nada. Assad rents a room in the Shatt hotel which is how he meets Marwan. After Marwan is propositioned by Abul Khaizuran, Marwan shares the information with Assad who meets with Abul Khaizuran, Abu Qais and Marwan to discuss the terms of being smuggled to Kuwait. Assad negotiates the deal with Abul Khaizuran for Abu Qais, Marwan and himself. He is very insightful and suggests that Haj Rida is involved with the smuggling. Eventually, he strikes a deal with Abul Khaizuran and meets Abul Khaizuran, Abu Qais and Marwan the next morning to begin their journey.

On the journey, Assad takes turns with Abu Qais and Marwan riding in the sun and shade. They hide in the water tank of the lorry when they come to the customs station at Safwan. Once Abul Khaizuran passes through Safwan and lets them out of the water tank, they complain about the heat in the tank. Again, they hide in the water tank as they come to the customs station at Mutlaa. Unfortunately, Abul Khaizuran is delayed by Abu Baqir, a customs official. Assad dies in the water tank while they are at Mutlaa. Abul Khaizuran considers burying his body in the desert, but instead he dumps it in Kuwait for the municipality to pick up.



## **Marwan appears in Men in the Sun**

Marwan is unable to afford paying fifteen dinars to the fat proprietor to be smuggled to Kuwait. In desperation, he threatens to call the police on the proprietor, causing the man to slap him. Marwan leaves the office in discouragement. On the street, Abul Khaizuran approaches Marwan and agrees to smuggle him for five dinars as long as Marwan helps him find additional men who want to be smuggled. Marwan writes a long letter to his mother and visits his father, who he does not hate for leaving his family because he believes his father still loves them. He meets with Abu Qais, Assad and Abul Khaizuran to discuss the plans for their journey to Kuwait, they come to an agreement, and he meets them the next morning.

On the journey, Marwan takes turns with Abu Qais and Assad riding in the sun and shade. They hide in the water tank of the lorry when they come to the customs station at Safwan. Once Abul Khaizuran passes through Safwan and lets them out of the water tank, they complain about the heat in the tank. Again, they hide in the water tank as they come to the customs station at Mutlaa. Unfortunately, Abul Khaizuran is delayed by Abu Baqir, a customs official. Marwan dies in the water tank while they are at Mutlaa. Abul Khaizuran considers burying his body in the desert, but instead he dumps it in Kuwait for the municipality to pick up.

## **Abul Khaizuran appears in Men in the Sun**

Abul Khaizuran approaches Marwan on the street and offers to smuggle him to Kuwait. He meets with Marwan and Assad and introduces them to Abu Qais. He agrees to smuggle the men for ten dinars each. Abul Khaizuran is an excellent lorry driver who works for Haj Rida. He intends to hide the men in the water tank on the lorry. He eventually persuades the men to agree with his plan. Before reaching the customs station at Safwan, Abul Khaizuran hides the men in the water tank. He hurries through the customs station and releases the men from their temporary prison. During the drive, he remembers and mourns losing his manhood in the war.

As they approach Mutlaa, Abul Khaizuran promises the men that he will be quick; however, he is delayed when Abu Baqir harasses him about a dancer. He rushes away from Mutlaa and opens the tank to find the corpses of Assad, Marwan and Abu Qais. He mourns his companions. Abul Khaizuran considers burying the bodies in the desert, but he decides to unload the corpses for the municipality to dispose of properly. Abul Khaizuran returns to Basra, wishing that the men had banged on the side of the tank.

## **Narrator appears in The Land of the Sad Oranges**

The narrator is the outcast in the person to whom he addresses the story's family. He feels that the patriarch of the family hates and resents him because his own father is gone. As he flees with the family from Acre, he questions the existence of a



compassionate God. When he sees the revolver on the floor, he realizes Father's intentions and runs to the hills, leaving his childhood behind.

## **Father appears in The Land of the Sad Oranges**

Father, in this story, packs his family, along with the narrator, and leaves Acre after the Jews attack. He seems to resent the narrator and curse the narrator's father. Father manages to obtain money to rent a house in the suburbs of Sidon where he is happy for a while. He throws cigarettes to the Arab armies when they march through town. Father sends the children to the hills to distract them from their hunger. One day, he is enraged by a small request and digs through his chest to find his revolver. He wants to kill the children and himself. Mother calms him, and Father weeps on the floor.

## **Son appears in If You Were a Horse**

The son in this story believes that his father hates him because his father always says that he wishes his son were a horse so that he could put a bullet through his brain. When his father goes to the country to visit friends, he finds a black leather notebook in a drawer. Based on the notes in it, he talks to Abu Muhammed who tells him that his father does not hate him; he is afraid of him. The son does not understand why his father is afraid of him. He is the best surgeon in the city, and none of his patients are afraid of him. When his father suffers from acute appendicitis, the son allows another surgeon to operate on his father when his father refuses to allow his son to treat him. After talking to the other surgeon after the operation, he learns the mystery of his father's fear relates to the reddish mark on his side that resembles the reddish mark on Barq's neck which superstition says is a mark of their victim's blood. The son questions the superstition as he walks home. He wonders if the other surgeon killed his father through negligence, thinking that it would be his fault if it were so. As he rushes back to the hospital, his footsteps sound like a horse galloping.

## **Abu Ibrahim appears in If You Were a Horse**

Abu Ibrahim is the father of the story. He wishes his son were a horse so that he could put a bullet through his brain. He loves his son but fears him. Abu Ibrahim used to be a great expert on horses and kept a notebook on pedigrees and prices. After Barq kills his wife, he moves to the city and blames himself for not adhering to superstition and killing Barq. When he suffers from acute appendicitis, he will not allow his son to operate. After undergoing anesthesia, Abu Ibrahim rambles to the surgeon about Barq and his wife.

## **Barq appears in If You Were a Horse**

Barq is a horse born with a red mark on his neck. Superstition states that the mark is his victim's blood, meaning he will kill someone close to the owner. Abu Ibrahim will not kill the horse because he is a beautiful thoroughbred and his most valuable possession. His



notes state that Barq is the most splendid horse he has ever seen and the quietest horse he has ever heard of. One day, Barq throws Abu Ibrahim's wife, crushes her skull with his hooves and pushes her into the river. Abu Muhammed shoots Barq in the head.

## **Nabil appears in A Hand in the Grave**

Nabil is a medical student who plans to rob a grave because he cannot afford a skeleton. He is very scared, but he packs and meets his friend, Suhail. Nabil and Suhail encourage one another in pursuing their plan until Suhail believes he touches the skeleton's eyes. It is Nabil's idea to obtain a skeleton, even though they did not need it, in order to feel like a part of the medical faculty. After this incident, he realizes that he cannot stand the sight of a skeleton and transfer to the school of law. Seven years later, he learns the true story of the cemetery.

## **Suhail appears in A Hand in the Grave**

Suhail attends medical school with Nabil. His uncle will not give him the seventy-five lire that he needs to purchase a skeleton so he decides to rob a grave with Nabil. Suhail searches in the hole they dig for the skeleton, but he suddenly screams and claims that he stuck his fingers in its eyes. He tells the other students about the incident, is declared mad and expelled.

## **Nabil's Father appears in A Hand in the Grave**

Nabil's father looks to release his rage every morning. He is proud that Nabil is a medical student, but he becomes angry when Nabil tells him of his plan to rob a grave. After hearing about the misadventure, he praises God and states that Nabil and Suhail received their due reward from the grave and the dead man. He believes the grave is that of a saint and visits it everyday to pray.

## **Narrator appears in Umm Saad**

The narrator is Umm Saad's cousin. Umm Saad used to live with him for many years and now visits him every Tuesday. He hears Umm Saad's story about Saad joining the fedayeen. The narrator advises her against visiting Saad at the military camp and points out that asking the commander to protect Saad is not a good idea since Saad wants to go to war, not be protected.

## **Umm Saad appears in Umm Saad**

Umm Saad lives with her cousin for many years until she moves to the camps. She still visits her cousin every Tuesday. One week, she tells her cousin that Saad, her son, has joined the fedayeen. Umm Saad would follow Saad but she has two other children to



take care of. She wonders if she should visit Saad and is disappointed to learn that a mother can be discarded so easily. Umm Saad asks her cousin to tell the commander to keep Saad safe but changes her mind and wants him to tell the commander to let Saad have his way. Umm Saad believes her son should be able to go to war immediately if he wants.

## **Saad appears in Umm Saad**

Saad is Umm Saad's son who joins the fedayeen without telling her. He does not appear in the story, but his action is the basis for the plot.

## **Abdallah appears in The Falcon**

Abdallah is the name that Jadaan calls all of the civil engineers but specifically the narrator. He is from a different class from the guards. Abdallah hears Mubarak's story about Jadaan and the red-haired woman. He then ignores Mubarak's request to file a complaint against Jadaan. Abdallah approaches Jadaad about gazelle hunting and hears the story of Nar.

## **Jadaan appears in The Falcon**

Jadaan is a Bedouin guard at the New Construction Company. He pays others to clean the bathrooms instead of doing it himself, inciting Mubarak's indignation. According to Mubarak, he fell in love with a red-haired woman during a gazelle hunt, but since she would not marry him, he divorced his wife and fled from his village. He goes to the New Construction Company because he wants to sit quietly and die peacefully.

## **Nar appears in The Falcon**

Nar is Jadaan's falcon. He is the best falcon in the village, and his name means "Fire." One day, Nar circles a gazelle and then perches. He refuses to eat for a week until he dies.

## **Narrator appears in Letter from Gaza**

The narrator writes a letter to his friend Mustafa, canceling his plans to join Mustafa in Sacramento, California. The narrator and Mustafa grew up together in the Shajiya quarter of Gaza and promised to follow the same path. The narrator takes care of his mother, his brother's widow and her four children. After Mustafa moves to Sacramento, the narrator receives a contract with the Ministry of Education in Kuwait. When Gaza is bombed, the narrator plans to expedite his journey to Sacramento, but first he visits his family. At his sister-in-law's request, he visits Nadia in the hospital and learns of her



amputation. The narrator decides against moving to Sacramento and begs Mustafa to come home and learn what life is about.

## **Mustafa appears in Letter from Gaza**

Mustafa is the recipient of the letter. He grew up in the Shajiya quarter of Gaza with the narrator, and the pair promised to follow the same path. While Mustafa worked for the Ministry of Education in Kuwait, he gave the narrator money to help support his family. Mustafa moves to Sacramento and waits for his friend to join him.

## **Nadia appears in Letter from Gaza**

Nadia is the narrator's niece. When Gaza is bombed, Nadia saves her younger brothers and sisters by throwing herself on top of them instead of saving herself. This results in an amputated leg. When her uncle visits her in the hospital and lies that he has bought her the red trousers she wanted, she cries and reveals her amputation. She is a symbol of hope in this collection of stories.



## **Objects/Places**

### **Water tank in lorry appears in Men in the Sun**

Abul Khaizuran drives a lorry for Haj Rida and uses it to smuggle people from Basra to Kuwait in the water tank. The tank is very hot and causes Assad, Marwan and Abu Qais to die when they are trapped in it for too long.

### **Basra appears in Men in the Sun**

Basra is the town or village where the four main characters of this story meet and begin their escape to Kuwait.

### **Kuwait appears in Men in the Sun**

Kuwait is seen as a land of opportunity which is why Assad, Marwan and Abu Qais pay Abul Khaizuran to smuggle them from Basra to Kuwait.

### **Shatt hotel appears in Men in the Sun**

The Shatt hotel is a rat-infested hotel in Basra where Marwan and Assad stay.

### **Customs stations appear in Men in the Sun**

There are two customs stations that the group encounters between Basra and Kuwait. Abul Khaizuran is able to quickly pass through the customs station at Safwan, but he is delayed by Abu Baqir at Mutlaa, resulting in the deaths of Assad, Marwan and Abu Qais from being trapped in the water tank for too long.

### **Acre appears in The Land of the Sad Oranges**

Acre is where the family lives before the Jews attack.

### **Sidon appears in The Land of the Sad Oranges**

Sidon is where the family flees as refugees after leaving Acre. They live with the addressed person's uncle and his family in one room in a Jewish family's home.





## **Orange appears in The Land of the Sad Oranges**

On the departure from Acre, the women buy oranges, which makes the father cry. At the end, the orange is dried up and shriveled. It seems to symbolize hope or dreams.

## **Hills appears in The Land of the Sad Oranges**

Father sends the children to the hills to make them forget their hunger in the morning. Mother sends the children there when Father becomes crazed and wants to kill himself and the children. The narrator runs to the hills when he realizes Father's intentions

## **Revolver appears in The Land of the Sad Oranges**

The revolver is hidden in the chest. When Father throws it to the floor, the narrator realizes his intentions.

## **Country appears in If You Were a Horse**

The country is where the son was born. His father lived there and raised horses until his wife's death.

## **City appears in If You Were a Horse**

After Mother's death, Father and his son move to the city.

## **Hospital appears in If You Were a Horse**

The son works at the hospital and is the best surgeon in the city. When his father suffers from acute appendicitis, he must go to the hospital though he refuses to allow his son to operate on him.

## **Black leather notebook appears in If You Were a Horse**

When Father visits friends in the country, the son finds a black leather notebook in a locked drawer. The notebook contains figures and pedigrees of horses, along with notes about Barq and Mother's death.

## **Reddish mole appears in If You Were a Horse**

Barq has a reddish mark on his neck; superstition dictates that it is a symbol that the horse will kill someone close to its owner. The son has a similar mark on his side which



is the reason his father wishes his son were a horse so that he could put a bullet through his son's brain.

## **Medical school appears in A Hand in the Grave**

Nabil and Suhail attend medical school which is the reason that they need a skeleton. After the incident with the skeleton, Suhail is declared mad and expelled, and Nabil switches to studying law because he cannot stand the sight of skeletons.

## **Skeleton appears in A Hand in the Grave**

Nabil and Suhail tell their father and uncle, respectively, that they need a skeleton for school, but a skeleton costs seventy-five lire. Both refuse to give Nabil and Suhail the money, so the medical students decide to rob a grave instead. In actuality, Nabil and Suhail do not need the skeleton for school; they simply believe it will make them feel more like they belong.

## **Graveyard appears in A Hand in the Grave**

Nabil and Suhail go to a graveyard to rob a grave. It is actually a peasant's store of wheat and flour during the years of famine, which Nabil discovers seven years after their incident.

## **Fedayeen appears in Umm Saad**

The fedayeen is a guerilla army which Saad joins.

## **New Construction Company appears in The Falcon**

Abdallah, Jadaan and Mubarak work at the New Construction Company. Jadaan plans to die there peacefully.

## **Complaint appears in The Falcon**

Mubarak asks Abdallah to write a complaint against Jadaan for refusing to clean the bathrooms.

## **Gazelle hunting appears in The Falcon**

Mubarak tells Abdallah a rumor about Jadaan falling in love with a red-haired girl when he was gazelle hunting. When Abdallah asks Jadaan about gazelle hunting, Jadaan



tells him that it is a disgrace to hunt gazelle with a gun; they should be caught like a chicken. Jadaan also tells Abdallah the story of his falcon, Nar.

## **Ministry of Education appears in Letter from Gaza**

Mustafa has a contract at the Ministry of Education, which is located in Kuwait, before moving to Sacramento. After Mustafa moves, the narrator obtains a contract at the Ministry of Education.

## **Kuwait appears in Letter from Gaza**

The narrator lives in Kuwait, which is also where the Ministry of Education is located.

## **Sacramento, California appears in Letter from Gaza**

Mustafa moves to Sacramento, California in pursuance of a better life. The narrator plans to join Mustafa until Gaza is bombed.

## **Hospital appears in Letter from Gaza**

The narrator visits his niece, Nadia, in the hospital in Gaza.

## **Red trousers appears in Letter from Gaza**

Nadia had asked her uncle, the narrator, to buy her red trousers. In the hospital, he lies and says he brought them to her, causing her to lift her blanket and reveal her amputated leg.

## **Shajiya Quarter of Gaza appears in Letter from Gaza**

Mustafa and the narrator grew up together in the Shajiya Quarter of Gaza.

## **Bombing of Gaza appears in Letter from Gaza**

After the bombing of Gaza, the narrator decides to go to California immediately, but he visits his family first. During the bombing, Nadia saved her younger brothers and sisters by throwing herself on them instead of running away and saving herself. This resulted in having her leg amputated. Because of this, the narrator realizes that he can learn more about life in Gaza than in California and decides to stay in Gaza.



# Themes

## Displacement

Displacement is a recurring theme throughout all of the stories. In "Men in the Sun," the largest example of this is the fact that smuggling is a profitable business. The fat proprietor demonstrates the willingness of many to spend extravagant amounts of money to be smuggled to Kuwait. Assad has previously been smuggled from one place to another, though unsuccessfully. This is also evidenced by the fact that Assad, Marwan and Abu Qais all want to leave Basra. Abul Khaizuran smuggles the men, leading to their displacement. The fact that this is illegal is proven by the customs stations that are set up along the road. In "The Land of Sad Oranges," the family relocates from Jaffa to Acre before the story begins. Then, they are forced to flee to Sidon after the Jews attack in Acre. Even the children are constantly displaced from their home since they are sent to the hills whenever Father is in a rage.

In "If You Were a Horse," Father and his son move from the country to the city after Barq kills Mother. Although there is not as obvious a displacement in "A Hand in the Grave," Suhail's expulsion and Nabil's decision to change his studies from medicine to law serve as a form of displacement. Umm Saad moves from her cousin's house to the camps, while Saad leaves his mother's home and joins the fedayeen. In "The Falcon," Jadaan and Mubarak both abandon their villages to work in the New Construction Company. Also, the gazelle leaves its people to stay under Nar's perch. Mustafa and the narrator from "Letter from Gaza" are born in Gaza but move to Kuwait for work. Then, Mustafa moves to Sacramento where the narrator plans to join him. The narrator's petition to his friend at the end of his letter provides the chance that Mustafa may be displaced from Sacramento and return to Gaza.

## Hopelessness

Many of the characters in this collection of stories show examples of hopelessness and despair. Abu Qais throws himself on the ground as he considers being smuggled from Basra to Kuwait, but he must go for his family because his situation in Basra is hopeless as well. Assad distrusts the fat proprietor but is forced to adhere to the man's rules since it is his only chance to get out of Basra. His uncle's desire for him to marry Nada makes him despair as well. Marwan despairs in the street after realizing that he cannot afford to pay the fat proprietor the money required to be smuggled to Kuwait. Abu Qais, Assad and Marwan allow Abul Khaizuran to smuggle them to Kuwait because they are desperate and have little other choice. On their journey, Abul Khaizuran recalls and laments his loss of manhood. In "The Land of Sad Oranges," Father cries when they buy an orange and leave the orange groves and when the Arab army leaves. In both cases, he sees himself losing something that brings him hope. His despair becomes more pronounced with his desire to kill the children and himself. The narrator and the



recipient of the story despair over their loss of childhood that results from Father's desire to kill them.

Father, from "If You Were a Horse," wishes his son were a horse so he could put a bullet through his brain, showing his complete despair over his wife's death and his hopelessness in disproving the superstition of the red mark on his son's side. Nabil and Suhail decide to rob a grave because they cannot borrow the money necessary to purchase a skeleton. Jadaan desires to sit quietly and die peacefully; like Nar, he has given up on living. Mustafa's departure to California shows his despair in Gaza changing and becoming a better place. The narrator's similar plan shows his similar viewpoint. Nadia despairs over her amputated leg. Throughout the collection, the only character who does not appear overcome with hopelessness and despair is Saad from "Umm Saad;" he proves himself the antithesis of the other characters by joining the fedayeen and doing something to combat the negativity in his life.

## War

War is mentioned in nearly all of the stories in this collection; however, even when it is not referred to explicitly, its presence pervades the background of the story. The warlike atmosphere is the reason that Assad, Marwan and Abu Qais wants to escape from Basra in "Men in the Sun." Abul Khaizuran also laments about losing his manhood when he was fighting in the war. In "The Land of Sad Oranges," Jews attack in Acre, causing the family to relocate. After they are resettled in a village on the outskirts of Sidon, Father excitedly drags the children to watch the army marching through Sidon. In "Umm Saad," Saad joins the fedayeen and Umm Saad wants the commander to send her send into battle immediately if that is what Saad wants. The bombing in Gaza is the reason that the narrator from "Letter from Gaza" decides against moving to Sacramento with Mustafa.

Some of the stories contain less conspicuous references to war. In "If You Were a Horse," the father loses his battle against the superstition of Barq's red mark with Abu Muhammed. The son realizes that he and his father are in a new battle, but the winner is not specified as the story ends before he learns whether his father is still alive. While attempting to rob a grave, fear and courage fight battles within both Suhail and Nabil. In both cases, fear wins because Suhail goes insane and is expelled from medical school while Nabil transfer to the school of law. The gazelle hunting in "The Falcon" can be seen as a battle between man and nature, while there is also a battle between social classes, in the form of the guards and engineers.



# Style

## Point of View

The point of view of "Men in the Sun" is third person. The point of view is omniscient and reliable. It alternates the focus of the story amongst the four main characters. It is important to the story because it allows the reader to identify with each character individually before being associated with their shared fate. There is a fairly equal distribution of exposition and dialogue within the story. "The Land of Sad Oranges" is told through a first person, limited point of view. It is addressed to an unknown person. The story is told through exposition with small patches of monologue, but it contains no dialogue. In "If You Were a Horse," the point of view is third person and limited. Dialogue predominates throughout the story.

The point of view of "A Hand in the Grave" is first person and limited, as can be seen by Nabil's misunderstandings with Suhail. There is an equal distribution of dialogue and exposition. In "Umm Saad," the point of view is first person and limited. The narrator is not reliable, which can be seen in his subjective misunderstandings of the way Umm Saad feels at certain points in time during the story. The story is mostly told through dialogue and the narrator's internal monologue. "The Falcon" is told through a first person, limited point of view. It begins with mostly exposition but ends with a predominant amount of dialogue. In "Letter from Gaza," the point of view is first person, limited and written in the form of a letter therefore making the story heavy on exposition.

## Setting

Although each story is set in similar locations, the specific settings for each story are different. "Men in the Sun" begins in Basra with four men who want to be smuggled to Kuwait, which they see as a land of opportunity. Two of the men, Assad and Marwan, live in the Shatt hotel in Basra. In order to get to Kuwait, they allow Abul Khaizuran to smuggle them in a water tank on his lorry. They pass through the customs station at Safwan easily, but the delay at the customs station in Mutlaa results in the deaths of the men being smuggled. The story ends in Kuwait where Abul Khaizuran dumps the corpses of his companions. "The Land of Sad Oranges" begins in Acre where the family is forced to depart in their lorry when the Jews attack. They stop at an orange grove on their departure. At Ras Naquora, they must relinquish their weapons. They stay in Sidon for several nights with the addressed person's uncle and his family in a small room in a Jewish family's house. They then relocate to a village outside of Sidon. The children are sent to the nearby hills every morning to distract them from their hunger; the narrator also flees to the hills when he realizes Father's intention with the revolver.

The background of "If You Were a Horse" takes place in the country where Father lived before Mother's death. The remainder of the story takes place in the city where Father relocated with his son. The son works in the hospital which is where Father goes when



he suffers from acute appendicitis. "A Hand in the Grave" begins in Nabil's house where he argues with his father. It then proceeds to the graveyard where Nabil and Suhail attempt to rob a grave for its skeleton. Although no action takes place there, medical school is a location that is mentioned and controls much of the action of the story. "Umm Saad" occurs in the narrator's home where Umm Saad has a conversation about Saad joining the fedayeen with her cousin. The camp where Umm Saad moved and the military base where Saad is stationed is also mentioned. "The Falcon" takes place in the buildings of the New Construction Company. The background stories that are told take place in the desert where Jadaan formerly lived. "Letter from Gaza" is addressed from Gaza to Sacramento. The narrator mentions growing up in Gaza and working in Kuwait. Mustafa has moved to Sacramento, and the narrator planned to join his friend before the bombing of Gaza. The narrator changes his plans after visiting his niece in the hospital.

## Language and Meaning

The language of the story is casual and conversational. The language has been translated into English which always involves a loss of some of the meaning in any literary work. The language allows the reader to become immersed in the world of each story. The stories are told in different manners, some of them more factual while others are very subjective since they are addressed to individuals within the narrator's social group.

The language of the stories characterizes certain situations by the tone used and the use of approving or condemning vocabulary. The action of each story takes place over a short amount of time with the exclusion of background information and flashbacks. The use of language in each story makes the stories very easy to understand and highly entertaining. Use of certain examples also serves to elicit specific reactions and emotions from the reader.

## Structure

This book is broken down into seven stories. The first story is the longest at fifty-four pages. The other stories are under ten pages each. Each story's title refers to the contents of the story. The stories are very short and contain a short amount of time. Each story in the book has a different plot. "Men in the Sun" has one main plot with several subplots. The other stories tend to have no subplots.

Some of the stories are very descriptive whereas others contain more dialogue. The pace of the book is very quick due to the length of the stories and the equal combination of dialogue and exposition. "If You Were a Horse" and "Letters from Gaza" contain flashbacks which are easy to decipher. "A Hand in the Grave" is a flashback for the entire story. Background information is provided in "The Falcon." With the exception of "Men in the Sun," each story is very easy to read. "Men in the Sun" has several subplots where Abu Qais, Assad and Marwan are introduced and their background is provided.

Flashbacks are also very common throughout this story and are interwoven into the story so as to make it occasionally difficult to determine what is occurring in the present and what occurs as a flashback.





## Quotes

"He felt the unuttered insult wound his throat, and he had an urge to give the fifty dinars back to his uncle, to throw them in his face with all the strength in his arms and all the hatred in his heart. To marry him off to Nada! Who told him that he wanted to marry Nada? Just because his father had recited the Fatiha with his uncle when he and Nada were born on the same day? His uncle considered that was fate. Indeed he had refused a hundred suitors who had asked for his daughter's hand and told them she was engaged. O God of devils! Who told him that he, Assad, wanted to marry her? Who told him that he ever wanted to get married? Here he was now reminding him again. He wanted to buy him for his daughter as you buy a sack of manure for a field. He tightened his grasp on the money in his pocket and got ready to get up. But when he touched it there in his pocket, soft and warm, he felt he was holding the keys of his whole future. If he allowed his rage to get the better of him now and gave the money back to his uncle, he would never be offered the opportunity of fifty dinars by any means." "Men in the Sun", p. 32-33

"One doesn't have to be a genius to understand. Everyone stops sending money to their families when they get married or fall in love...I'm glad you are going to Kuwait, because you will learn many things there. The first thing you will learn is: money comes first, and then morals." "Men in the Sun", p. 42

"Just imagine! In my own mind I compare these hundred and fifty kilometers to the path that God in the Quran promised his creatures they must cross before being directed either to Paradise or to Hell. If anyone falls he goes to Hell, and if anyone crosses safely he reaches Paradise. Here the angels are the frontier guards." "Men in the Sun", p. 52

"Now...ten years had passed since that horrible scene. Ten years had passed since they took his manhood from him, and he had lived that humiliation day after day and hour after hour. He had swallowed it with his pride, and examined it every moment of those ten years. And still he hadn't yet got used to it, he hadn't accepted it. For ten long years he had been trying to accept the situation? But what situation? To confess quite simply that he had lost his manhood while fighting for his country? And what good had it done? He had lost his manhood and his country, and damn everything in this bloody world." "Men in the Sun", p. 53

"He put two firm hands on the edge of the opening and, supporting himself on his strong arms, slid down inside the tank. It was very dark there, and at first he couldn't make out anything, but when he moved his body away from the opening a circle of yellow light fell into the depths and showed a chest covered with thick gray hair that began to shine brightly as though coated with tin. Abul Khaizuran bent to put his ear to the damp gray hair. The body was cold and still. Stretching out his hand, he felt his way to the back of the tank. The other body was still holding on to the metal support. He tried to find the head but could only feel the wet shoulders; then he made out the head, bowed on the chest. When his hand touched the face, it fell into a mouth open as wide as it could go." "Men in the Sun", p. 71



"The groves of orange trees followed each other in succession along the side of the road. We were all eaten up with fear." "The Land of Sad Oranges", p. 76

"In the afternoon, when we reached Sidon, we had become refugees. We were among those swallowed up by the road." "The Land of Sad Oranges", p. 76

"He knew his father through and through, and he knew that the past was, for him, a solid wooden box locked with a thousand keys that had been cast into the depths of the ocean." "If You Were a Horse...", p. 82

"That was the explanation, then. The brown mark, tinged with red, which zigzagged across much of his right side and back, a mark like the one that had covered Barq's side, the victim's blood, as the legend put it. That mark, which his girlfriend had been touching one day when she said: 'It's the biggest mole I've ever seen. But why is it reddish, like a patch of blood?' That was it, then. His poor father was afraid of him because he carried the mark of his victim's blood on his side from birth, as Barq had borne his mother's blood for years before he met her, crushed her skull, and pushed her into the river. This, then, was what had tortured his father for thirty years and made him wish that his son were a horse, so that he would have the right to put a bullet in his brain." "If You Were a Horse...", p. 86-87

"I woke up early to rob a grave... To rob a grave. Yes. Is that strange? In the faculty, we need a skeleton, and Suhail and I have been told to provide it... Yes, to rob a grave, and steal the skeleton of some man who has been dead more than twenty years because I want to study it." "A Hand in the Grave", p. 90

"I was still gazing at her hands, folded palms upwards like two disappointed creatures, crying out from the heart, chasing the man who was leaving everything for danger and the unknown. Why, O God, must mothers lose their sons? For the first time I was seeing that heartbreaking situation, at a word's distance from me, as though we were in a Greek theatre living out a scene of inconsolable grief." "Umm Saad", p. 100

"There's no need to visit him there. Let him manage alone. A man who joins the fedayeen doesn't need his mother to look after him anymore." "Umm Saad", p. 101

"He said he doesn't work here. He said that he merely sits here as a man may do anywhere in the world. Well, he said he had been through a great deal, and here a man can eat sitting down. Well, he said too that he wants to die here peacefully and doesn't wish to return to his people. He's mad, I say." "The Falcon", p. 105-106

"It went to die among its people. Gazelles like to die among their people. Falcons don't care where they die." "The Falcon", p. 109

"We grew up together, understanding each other completely, and we promised to go on together till the end." "Letter from Gaza", p. 111

"My life there had a gluey, vacuous quality as though I were a small oyster, lost in oppressive loneliness, slowly struggling with a future as dark as the beginning of the



night, caught in a rotten routine, a spewed-out combat with time. Everything was hot and sticky. There was a slipperiness to my whole life, it was all a hankering for the end of the month." "Letter from Gaza", p. 112

"They told me that Nadia had lost her leg when she threw herself on top of her little brothers and sisters to protect them from the bombs and flames that had fastened their claws into the house. Nadia could have saved herself, she could have run away, rescued her leg. But she didn't. Why?" "Letter from Gaza", p. 115

"No, my friend, I won't come to Sacramento, and I've no regrets. No, and nor will I finish what we began together in childhood. This obscure feeling that you had as you left Gaza, this small feeling must grow into a giant deep within you. It must expand, you must seek it in order to find yourself, here among the ugly debris of defeat. I won't come to you. But you, return to us! Come back, to learn from Nadia's leg, amputated from the top of the thigh, what life is and what existence is worth. Come back, my friend! We are all waiting for you." "Letter from Gaza", p. 115



## Topics for Discussion

From "Men in the Sun," compare and contrast Abul Khaizuran with the fat proprietor who smuggles men for fifteen dinars.

In "Men in the Sun," how are the three refugees' stories and hopes alike? How are they different?

How is the orange from "The Land of the Sad Oranges" symbolic? Who or what does it symbolize? Justify your answer.

Superstition plays a large role in "If You Were a Horse." Explain how the father and the son both disregard and adhere to superstition.

In "A Hand in the Grave," why is it ironic that Nabil and Suhail's attempt at robbing a grave changes their career paths? (Suhail is expelled for insanity while Nabil transfers to law school because he cannot stand the sight of a skeleton.)

In "Umm Saad," describe the several ways that Umm Saad shows her extreme love for her son, Saad.

In "The Falcon," how is Jadaan's story about Nar's death symbolic in consideration of the story that Mubarak told about Jadaan's employment at the New Construction company?

Why does the narrator decide to stay in Gaza instead of joining Mustafa in Sacramento, California?