



Zaher Omareen

## *A Bedtime Story for Eid*

**Link to text:** <https://www.wordswithoutborders.org/article/a-bedtime-story-for-eid>

**Author Biography:**

Zaher Omareen is a Syrian researcher, writer and artist living in the UK. His short story 'First Safety Maneuver' won a prize awarded by the Danish Institute in Damascus and by the 2012 Copenhagen Festival of Literature. He has worked on independent cultural initiatives in Syria and Europe, and co-curated exhibitions on the art of the Syrian uprising. He studied media, journalism, and theatrical and dramatic arts in Damascus, an MA in media and cultural studies from Sussex University, and is currently a PhD candidate in contemporary documentary cinema and new media at Goldsmiths College, London. 'A Bedtime Story for Eid' is taken from his forthcoming Tales of the Orontes River, a collection of interlocking short stories drawn from the collective memories of the 1982 Hama massacre. Omareen is also the co-editor of Syria Speaks: Art and Culture from the Frontline (Saqi, 2014), which discusses the artistic and culture outcomes of the Syrian uprising.

Rasha Abbas

## *Falling Down Politely, or How to Use Up All Six Bullets Instead of Playing Russian Roulette*

**Link to text:** <https://www.wordswithoutborders.org/article/falling-down-politely-or-how-to-use-up-all-six-bullets-instead-of-playing-r>

**Author Biography:**

Rasha Abbas is a Syrian journalist and short-story writer, currently based in Berlin. She was born in Latakia and brought up in Damascus, where she studied journalism at university. In 2008, she published her first short story collection, Adam Hates the Television, and was awarded a prize for young writers during the Damascus Capital of Arab Culture festival. Following the onset of the civil war in 2011 and her involvement in the anti-government protest movement, she was forced into exile in Lebanon. In 2014 she was awarded a Jean-Jacques Rousseau fellowship for a three-month residency at the Akademie Schloss Solitude in Stuttgart. During this time, she published her second book of short stories, The Invention of German Grammar, a satirical fictionalisation of her experiences of settling in Germany as a refugee, and of learning the German language. She contributed, both as a writer and as a translator, to Syria Speaks: Art and Culture from the Frontline. Her latest collection, The Gist of It, was released in 2019.

### Questions:

- Did either of these stories make you feel uncomfortable? If so, how?
- Both were translated and published in 2014 but are set in very different points in history. How are time and place evoked in each of these works?
- In what ways do Omareen and Abbas engage with the politics of storytelling? Are there any similarities between them?
- Whereas 'A Bedtime Story for Eid' is accompanied by a contextualising 'Translator's Note', 'Falling Down Politely' is left unglossed. What effect does this have on how you approach each story?
- In 'A Bedtime Story for Eid', the character of Um Omara is described as having become 'an exemplar of suffering, somehow' – how else might she be read?
- Would 'an exemplar for suffering' be an appropriate way to describe Abbas' narrator?
- What significance does re-naming and/or misnaming have in 'A Bedtime Story for Eid'?
- How is the relationship between death and growth explored in each of these works?
- What do you make of the form and structure of 'Falling Down Politely', and in particular the final section? How does it shape your understanding of the story as a whole?
- Both 'A Bedtime Story for Eid' and 'Falling Down Politely' open with questions. Questions are repeatedly raised within, as well as by, them. To what extent do these narratives offer a sense of resolution?

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### Further reading:

More stories from the *Tales of the Orontes River* can be found here:

'Blood Brothers' and 'Birthmark' – <https://cld.bz/uNsYdMy/104>

'The Man Who Hates Sneezing, A Story From Syria' – <https://mdash-ahb.org/past-issues/issue-10-winterfall-2017/the-man-who-hates-sneezing/>