

The King of India

Jabbour Douaihy

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A prodigal son comes home in the wake of tragedy in Jabbour Douaihy's compelling novel *The King of India*.

After several years and a storied life abroad, Zakariya returns to Lebanon. Surrounded by an air of melancholy, he interacts little with his sister and aunt. One morning, he takes a walk to his family's orchard. By sunset, he is found dead with a single gunshot wound to the heart. It is unclear who murdered him, but memory is long in Lebanon. Investigating judge Kamal Abu Khalid will have to absorb over a century's worth of gossip and history to find the culprit.

The Mubarak family has deep ties to the village of Tel Sefra, and made enemies of neighbors and extended family alike. Zakariya's death, and the subsequent investigation, serve as a framework to delve into those intricate connections. The book reaches backward in time, focusing first on the women of the family, then the men, and finally, on Zakariya and his sister. In doing so, the mysteries of Zakariya's life abroad, his mournful return, and the similarities between himself and his ancestors are clarified.

Despite the passage of time being central to the story, it is alluded to in abstract ways. Characters travel by sea, then by air. Communication is nonexistent, then by letter, then by telephone. Children become parents, then grandparents. Removing concrete time from the bulk of the story allows each character to exist both as an individual and as a keystone in the Mubarak family history. In a book wherein everyone is important: the story returns to the investigation with an increased understanding of the significance of the case to those who remain alive.

In the literary novel *The King of India*, a family's enduring connection to their homeland is traced.

DONTANÁ MCPHERSON-JOSEPH (July / August 2022)

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