

On Divan

by James Sweetbaum

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On Divan follows the lives of three brothers, Khalid, Rabi'e and Ayoub, as they navigate expectations about what it means to be a man in contemporary Casablanca.

Ayoub, the youngest brother, dreams of making it big in Hollywood using youthful charm and good looks. His faith in an American who once promised him a part in a movie is blind, and despite his sister Leila's efforts to convince him to study and make something of his life the only reality he sees is that of his dreams of the cinema.

Khalid, the eldest brother, has spent his youth helping his father in the grocery store and faces an uncertain future without any education or hope of having enough money to marry the woman he loves and start his own family . He swears to uphold traditional values and instil in his children the motto, "Study, Sport and Religion".

Only the middle brother Rabi'e, specializing as a doctor in a private clinic, looks forward to a secure future - much to his mother's pride - although she is oblivious to the fact that a love affair with a colleague and an unplanned pregnancy, threatens to derail his future.

Their father M'Bark's life has been marked by his decision to earn a modest yet proud living from a small grocery store rather than make it rich working for his father-in-law, a fact that Fatna, his wife, never fails to reproach him for.

The generational gulf between M'Bark and his sons is vast, and he finds it hard to comprehend their lives and the pressures they each face. Fatna constantly beseeches him to have a man-to-man talk with Ayoub to force some reality into their son's dreams of becoming a big star. On the way to the *hamam* with Ayoub, M'Bark finally decides to follow his wife's advice, although his words fall on deaf ears as Ayoub's focus quickly shifts back to appearance and body image. Most difficult for M'Bark to accept is his wife's retribution for taking Khalid to work in the grocery store at such a young age.

M'Bark's health takes a sudden down-turn and his son Rabi'e's efforts to have him properly diagnosed reveal an incurable liver condition. On his death bed M'Bark imparts his final blessing to his sons, telling them not to second guess his wishes for them. Take your own path and you'll always have my blessing, are his dying words.

His sons' prayers accompany him to his grave. As rose water is poured over his tomb, his sons' hands move over the sandy stone honouring their loss with each caress.