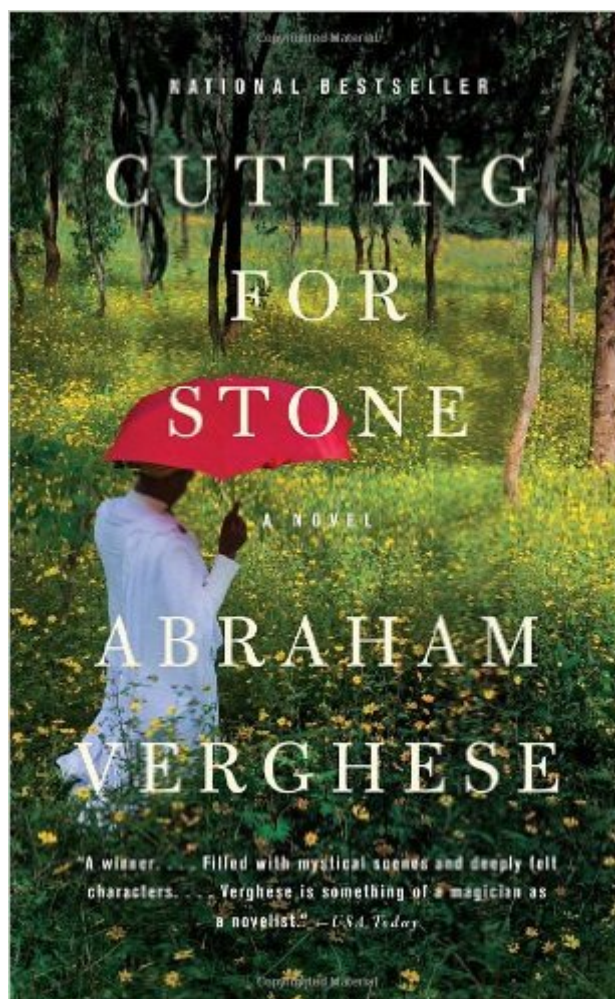


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Cutting For Stone



Synopsis

Marion and Shiva Stone are twin brothers born of a secret union between a beautiful Indian nun and a brash British surgeon. Orphaned by their mother's death and their father's disappearance, bound together by a preternatural connection and a shared fascination with medicine, the twins come of age as Ethiopia hovers on the brink of revolution. Moving from Addis Ababa to New York City and back again, *Cutting for Stone* is an unforgettable story of love and betrayal, medicine and ordinary miracles--and two brothers whose fates are forever intertwined.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This brilliant novel revolves around what is broken -- limbs, family ties, trust -- and the process of rebuilding them. It starts with the birth of twin boys to a nursing nun, Sister Mary Praise Joseph, in a small hospital on the outskirts of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia; an event which no one had expected: "The everyday miracle of conception had taken place in the one place it should not have: in Sister Mary Praise Joseph's womb." The delivery rapidly becomes a debacle when it's clear that Mary Praise Joseph can't deliver her baby normally; the last minute arrival home at "Missing" (the Mission Hospital) by Indian obstetrician Hema saves the children, but their mother dies and their presumed father, surgeon Thomas Stone, disappears into the night. That brief summary does no justice to Verghese's powerful and remarkable prose style or the structure of the first part of the book which, although it revolves around the tragedy that claims the life of the twins' mother, also introduces the other main characters who will take the place of their biological parents. Darting back and forth between the events in the surgical theater (as Thomas Stone, horrified at what he sees,

first tries to save Mary Joseph Praise's life by collapsing the skull of the infant he believes cannot be born alive), the mundane daily activities of his fellow doctor, Ghosh (trying to escape what he believes is a hopeless love for Hema) and Hema's struggle to get home to Missing from her annual holiday in India, the reader will find it impossible to put the book down and wants only to find a way of reading faster and faster to discover what happens next.

Abraham Verghese has layered his tale that spans continents, moving as it does from India to Africa and then to the US, full of double meanings - like flavor upon flavor. The overall story is rich, multifaceted. As a straight-up tale the book is a very good read. But for me, much of the delight of this novel was to catch the double entendres Verghese has laden into the story. Here are some examples:
*NAMES: The main characters, twin boys, born to a beautiful Indian nursing nun whom no one even suspected was pregnant, were technically conjoined, sharing a short stalk of flesh at the top of their heads, essentially one organism in the womb. They are identical - mirror images of each other on the surface - separated during their brutal cesarean birth. The surgeon, their presumed father, cannot even comprehend their existence. Dr. Thomas Stone is so horrified by his failure to save the beloved nun, his surgical assistant for several years, he runs from the operating theater at Mission Hospital in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, abandoning the newborns. With no guidance from the newly dead nun, nor from the abandoning surgeon/father, Hema, a fellow surgeon and eventually their adoptive mother, names the boys Marion and Shiva. Marion is said to be named after a famed groundbreaking surgeon Hema admires. However, it is a potent signal from Verghese about Marion's ultimate nature: he is more like his mother (Marion - Mary-like) in that he will grow to be compassionate, brave, willing to help in whatever way he can and yet very contained about his own sexuality. It will be much of his undoing. The name choice of Shiva for the other twin is said in the story to be a nod to Hema's own cultural heritage as she is also Indian. But again, there are more subtle meanings that Verghese is alluding to.

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