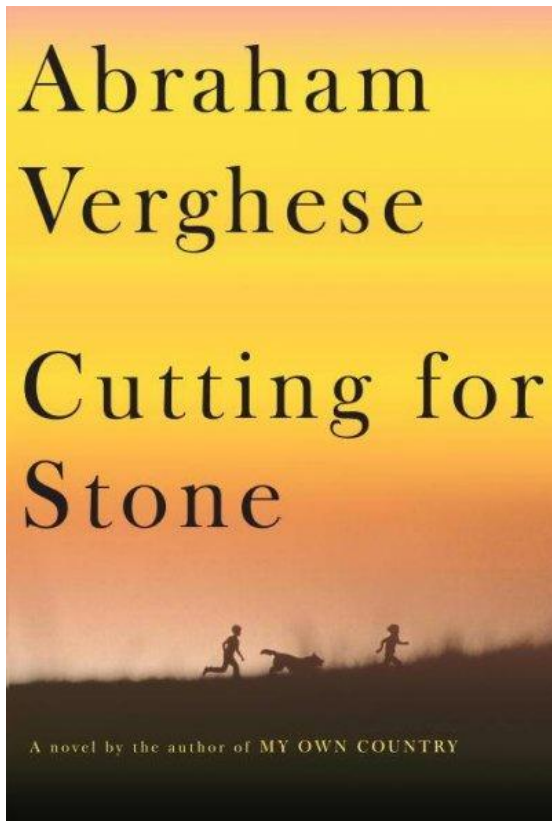


About the Book...



An epic novel that spans continents and generations, *Cutting for Stone* is an unforgettable story of love and betrayal, compassion and redemption, exile and home that unfolds across five decades in India, Ethiopia, and America.

Narrated by Marion Stone, the story begins even before Marion and his twin brother, Shiva, are born in Addis Ababa's Missing Hospital (a mispronunciation of "Mission Hospital"), with the illicit, years-in-the-making romance between their parents, Sister Mary Joseph Praise, a beautiful Indian nun, and Thomas Stone, a brash, brilliant British surgeon. Mary and Thomas meet on a boat out of Madras in 1947; she follows him to Ethiopia and to Missing, where they work side by side for seven years as nurse and doctor.

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The twins are raised by Hema and Ghosh, two Indian doctors who also work at Missing, and who shower Marion and Shiva with love and nurture their interest in medicine—part of the deep, almost preternatural connection the brothers share. They are so close that Marion, as a boy, thinks of them as a single entity: ShivaMarion.

Marion and Shiva come of age as Ethiopia hovers on the brink of revolution, and their lives become intertwined with the nation's politics. Addis Ababa is a colorful, cosmopolitan city: the Italians have left behind cappuccino machines,

Campari umbrellas, and a vibrant expat community. But they've also left a nation crippled by poverty, hunger, and authoritarian rule: Ethiopia in the 1960s and 1970s is both bolstered and trapped by its notorious emperor, Haile Selassie, and rocked by violence and civil war.

Yet it is not politics but love that tears the brothers apart: Shiva sleeps with Genet—the daughter of their housekeeper and the girl Marion has always loved. This second betrayal, now by the two people this sensitive young man loves most, sends Marion into a deep depression. And when Genet joins a radical political group fighting for the independence of Eritrea, Marion's connection to her forces him into exile: he sneaks out of Ethiopia and makes his way to America.

Marion interns at a hospital in the Bronx, an underfunded, chaotic place where the patients are nearly as poor and desperate as those he had seen at Missing. It is here that Marion comes to maturity as a doctor and as a man. It is here, too, that he meets his father and takes his first steps toward reconciling with him. But when the past catches up to Marion—nearly destroying him—he must entrust his life to the two men he thought he trusted least in the world: the father who abandoned him and the brother who betrayed him. The surprising, stunning denouement both arises from and reenacts the major themes of *Cutting for Stone*: love and betrayal, forgiveness and self-sacrifice, and the inextricable union of life and death.

About the Author...



Abraham Verghese was born in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in 1955. He received an M.D. from Madras University, India, in 1979, and came to the U.S a year later to do a residency in Tennessee. He also earned an M.F.A. from the University of Iowa in 1991.

Abraham Verghese is Professor and Senior Associate Chair for the Theory and Practice of Medicine at the Stanford University School of Medicine. He was the founding director of the Center for Medical Humanities & Ethics at the University of Texas Health Science Center, San Antonio, where he is now an adjunct professor. Verghese has been involved mainly in medical research and teaching.

His specialties include internal medicine, pulmonary diseases, geriatrics, and infectious diseases; the latter has led to an interest in AIDS, which has been the subject of much of his writing. Verghese's thesis was a collection of stories about AIDS, and he then went on to write *My Own Country: A Doctor's Story of a Town and Its People in the Age of AIDS*.

Verghese, who is divorced, has two children, Steven and Jacob, and resides in El Paso, Tex.

Awards

Cutting for Stone received the 2010 Indies Choice Book Award for adult fiction from the American Book Sellers Association. The winner is chosen by owners and staff of the Association's member independent bookstores.

Reviews

Publishers Weekly

Lauded for his sensitive memoir (*My Own Country*) about his time as a doctor in eastern Tennessee at the onset of the AIDS epidemic in the '80s, Verghese turns his formidable talents to fiction, mining his own life and experiences in a magnificent, sweeping novel that moves from India to Ethiopia to an inner-city hospital in New York City over decades and generations. Sister Mary Joseph Praise, a devout young nun, leaves the south Indian state of Kerala in 1947 for a missionary post in Yemen. During the arduous sea voyage, she saves the life of an English doctor bound for Ethiopia, Thomas Stone, who becomes a key player in her destiny when they meet up again at Missing Hospital in Addis Ababa. Seven years later, Sister Praise dies birthing twin boys: Shiva and Marion, the latter narrating his own and his brother's long, dramatic, biblical story set against the backdrop of political turmoil in Ethiopia, the life of the hospital compound in which they grow up and the love story of their adopted parents, both doctors at Missing. The boys become doctors as well and Verghese's weaving of the practice of medicine into the narrative is fascinating even as the story bobs and weaves with the power and coincidences of the best 19th-century novel.

Library Journal

Focusing on the world of medicine, this epic first novel by well-known doctor/author Verghese (*My Own Country*) follows a man on a mythic quest to

find his father. It begins with the dramatic birth of twins slightly joined at the skull, their father serving as surgeon and their mother dying on the table. The horror-struck father vanishes, and the now separated boys are raised by two Indian doctors living on the grounds of a mission hospital in early 1950s Ethiopia. The boys both gravitate toward medical practice, with Marion the more studious one and Shiva a moody genius and loner. Also living on the hospital grounds is Genet, daughter of one of the maids, who grows up to be a beautiful and mysterious young woman and a source of ruinous competition between the brothers. After Marion is forced to flee the country for political reasons, he begins his medical residency at a poor hospital in New York City, and the past catches up with him. The medical background is fascinating as the author delves into fairly technical areas of human anatomy and surgical procedure.

Discussion Questions (Random House Reading Group Guide)

1. Abraham Verghese has said that his ambition in writing *Cutting for Stone* was to “tell a great story, an old-fashioned, truth-telling story.” In what ways is *Cutting for Stone* an old-fashioned story—and what does it share with the great novels of the nineteenth century? What essential human truths does it convey?
2. What does *Cutting for Stone* reveal about the emotional lives of doctors? Contrast the attitudes of Hema, Ghosh, Marion, Shiva, and Thomas Stone toward their work. What draws each of them to the practice of medicine? How are they affected, emotionally and otherwise, by the work they do?
3. Marion observes that in Ethiopia, patients assume that all illnesses are fatal and that death is expected, but in America, news of having a fatal illness “always seemed to come as a surprise, as if we took it for granted that we were immortal” [p. 486]. What other important differences does *Cutting for Stone* reveal about the way illness is viewed and treated in Ethiopia and in the United States? To what extent are these differences reflected in the split between poor hospitals, like the one in the Bronx where Marion works, and rich hospitals like the one in Boston where his father works?
4. In the novel, Thomas Stone asks, “What treatment in an emergency is administered by ear?” The correct answer is “Words of comfort.” How does this moment encapsulate the book's surprising take on medicine? Have your experiences with doctors and hospitals held this to be true?

Why or why not? What does *Cutting for Stone* tell us about the roles of compassion, faith, and hope in medicine?

5. There are a number of dramatic scenes on operating tables in *Cutting for Stone*: the twins' births, Thomas Stone amputating his own finger, Ghosh untwisting Colonel Mebratu's volvulus, the liver transplant, etc. How does Verghese use medical detail to create tension and surprise? What do his depictions of dramatic surgeries share with film and television hospital dramas—and yet how are they different?
6. Marion suffers a series of painful betrayals—by his father, by Shiva, and by Genet. To what degree is he able, by the end of the novel, to forgive them?
7. To what extent does the story of Thomas Stone's childhood soften Marion's judgment of him? How does Thomas's suffering as a child, the illness of his parents, and his own illness help to explain why he abandons Shiva and Marion at their birth? How should Thomas finally be judged?
8. In what important ways does Marion come to resemble his father, although he grows up without him? How does Marion grow and change over the course of the novel?
9. A passionate, unique love affair sets *Cutting for Stone* in motion, and yet this romance remains a mystery—even to the key players—until the very conclusion of the novel. How does the relationship between Sister Mary Joseph Praise and Thomas Stone affect the lives of Shiva and Marion, Hema and Ghosh, Matron and everyone else at Missing? What do you think Verghese is trying to say about the nature of love and loss?
10. What do Hema, Matron, Rosina, Sister Mary Joseph Praise, Genet, and Tsige—as well as the many women who come to Missing seeking medical treatment—reveal about what life is like for women in Ethiopia?
11. Addis Ababa is at once a cosmopolitan city thrumming with life and the center of a dictatorship rife with conflict. How do the influences of Ethiopia's various rulers—England, Italy, Emperor Selassie—reveal themselves in day-to-day life? How does growing up there affect Marion's and Shiva's worldviews?

12. As Ghosh nears death, Marion comments that the man who raised him had no worries or regrets, that “there was no restitution he needed to make, no moment he failed to seize” [p. 424]. What is the key to Ghosh's contentment? What makes him such a good father, doctor, and teacher? What wisdom does he impart to Marion?

13. Although it's also a play on the surname of the characters, the title *Cutting for Stone* comes from a line in the Hippocratic Oath: “I will not cut for stone, even for patients in whom the disease is manifest; I will leave this operation to be performed by practitioners, specialists in this art.” Verghese has said that this line comes from ancient times, when bladder stones were epidemic and painful: “There were itinerant stone cutters—lithologists—who could cut into either the bladder or the perineum and get the stone out, but because they cleaned the knife by wiping their blood-stiffened surgical aprons, patients usually died of infection the next day.” How does this line resonate for the doctors in the novel?

14. Almost all of the characters in *Cutting for Stone* are living in some sort of exile, self-imposed or forced, from their home country—Hema and Ghosh from India, Marion from Ethiopia, Thomas from India and then Ethiopia. Verghese is of Indian descent but was born and raised in Ethiopia, went to medical school in India, and has lived and worked in the United States for many years. What do you think this novel says about exile and the immigrant experience? How does exile change these characters, and what do they find themselves missing the most about home?

Further Reading

Abraham Verghese has also written:

My Own Country: A Doctor's Story of a Town and Its People in the Age of AIDS

- Winner of the 1994 Lambda Literary Award for Nonfiction
- Chosen by *Time* as one of the top five books of 1994

Nestled in the Smoky Mountains of eastern Tennessee, the town of Johnson City had always seemed exempt from the anxieties of modern American life. But on August 11, 1985, the local hospital treated its first AIDS patient, and, before long, a crisis that had once seemed an "urban problem" had arrived in the town to stay. Working in Johnson City was Abraham Verghese, a young Indian doctor specializing in infectious diseases. Of necessity, he became the local AIDS expert.

Vergheese brought a singular perspective to Johnson City: as a doctor unique in his abilities; as an outsider who could talk to people suspicious of local practitioners; above all, as a writer of grace and compassion who saw that what was happening in this conservative community was both a medical and a spiritual emergency. Out of his experience comes a startling but ultimately uplifting portrait of the American heartland as it confronts -- and surmounts -- its deepest prejudices and fears.

The Tennis Partner: A Doctor's Story of Friendship and Loss

- A *New York Times* Notable Book

When Abraham Vergheese, a physician whose marriage is unraveling, relocates to El Paso, Texas, he hopes to make a fresh start as a staff member at the county hospital. There he meets David Smith, a young medical resident recovering from drug addiction, and the two men begin a tennis ritual that allows them to shed their inhibitions and find security in the sport they love and with each other. This friendship between doctor and intern grows increasingly rich and complex, more intimate than two men usually allow. And just when it seems nothing more can go wrong, the dark beast from David's past emerges once again. As David spirals out of control, almost everything Vergheese has come to trust and believe is threatened. Compassionate and moving, *The Tennis Partner* is an unforgettable, illuminating story of how men live, and how they survive.

Vergheese's essays, short stories, articles, and reviews have appeared in numerous magazines and newspapers including *The New Yorker*, *New York Times*, *Atlantic Monthly*, *Esquire*, *Granta*, *Wall Street Journal*, *North American Review*, *Sports Illustrated*, and *MD*.

Further Watching

Hear and see Abraham Vergheese talk about medicine, his writing, and his inspiration for *Cutting for Stone* in video clips available to watch on his website, <http://www.abrahamverghese.com/videos.asp>.

Read Alikes

The Lassa Ward: One Man's Fight Against One of the World's Deadliest Diseases
by Ross Donaldson (Call number: 610.92 Do)

Ross Donaldson is one of just a few who have ventured into dark territory of a country ravaged by war to study one of the world's most deadly diseases. As an untried medical student studying the intersection of global health and

communicable disease, Donaldson soon found himself in dangerous Sierra Leone, on the border of war-struck Liberia, where he struggled to control the spread of Lassa Fever. With the country in complete upheaval and working conditions suffering, he is forced to make life-and-death decisions alone as a never-ending onslaught of contagious patients flood the hospital. Soon however, he is not only fighting for others but himself when he becomes afflicted with a life threatening disease.

Beneath the Lion's Gaze by Maaza Mengiste

This memorable, heartbreaking story opens in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 1974, on the eve of a revolution. Yonas kneels in his mother's prayer room, pleading to his god for an end to the violence that has wracked his family and country. His father, Hailu, a prominent doctor, has been ordered to report to jail after helping a victim of state-sanctioned torture to die. And Dawit, Hailu's youngest son, has joined an underground resistance movement—a choice that will lead to more upheaval and bloodshed across a ravaged Ethiopia. *Beneath the Lion's Gaze* tells a gripping story of family, of the bonds of love and friendship set in a time and place that has rarely been explored in fiction. It is a story about the lengths human beings will go in pursuit of freedom and the human price of a national revolution.

Away by Amy Bloom

Away is the epic and intimate story of young Lillian Leyb, a dangerous innocent, an accidental heroine. When her family is destroyed in a Russian pogrom, Lillian comes to America alone, determined to make her way in a new land. When word comes that her daughter, Sophie, might still be alive, Lillian embarks on an odyssey that takes her from the world of the Yiddish theater on New York's Lower East Side, to Seattle's Jazz District, and up to Alaska, along the fabled Telegraph Trail toward Siberia.

The Girls by Lori Lansens

In Lansens' astonishing second novel, readers come to know and love two of the most remarkable characters in Canadian fiction: Rose and Ruby, 29-year-old conjoined twins. It is an affecting portrait of the importance of connections, and the distance that exists within even the closest of bonds.

What Is the What by Dave Eggers

New York Times Notable Book *What Is the What* is the epic novel based on the life of Valentino Achak Deng who, along with thousands of other children--the so-called Lost Boys--was forced to leave his village in Sudan at the age of seven and

trek hundreds of miles by foot, pursued by militias, government bombers, and wild animals, crossing the deserts of three countries to find freedom. When he finally is resettled in the United States, he finds a life full of promise, but also heartache and myriad new challenges. Moving, suspenseful, and unexpectedly funny, *What Is the What* is an astonishing novel that illuminates the lives of millions through one extraordinary man.

Of Human Bondage by Somerset Maugham

From an orphan with a clubfoot, Philip Carey grows into an impressionable young man with a voracious appetite for adventure and knowledge. Then he falls obsessively in love, embarking on a disastrous relationship that will change his life forever.