# Cutting for Stone by Abraham Verghese

## Synopsis

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. After Mary dies while giving birth to the twins Thomas vanishes, and Marion and Shiva grow up with only a dim sense of who he was, and with a deep hostility toward him for what they see as an act of betrayal and cowardice.

Marion and Shiva come of age as Ethiopia hovers on the brink of revolution, and their lives become intertwined with the nation’s politics. 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.

## Discussion questions

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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?
6. 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?

Synopsis/*Discussion questions from https://www.readinggroupguides.com/reviews/cutting-for-stone/guide*