

Cutting for Stone

By Abraham Verghese
(Chatto & Windus)

THE FAST PACE and isolation of life in the Bronx is contrasted with the ancient social traditions of Ethiopia's Addis Ababa in *Cutting for Stone*, the first novel from acclaimed writer (and medical doctor) Abraham Verghese.

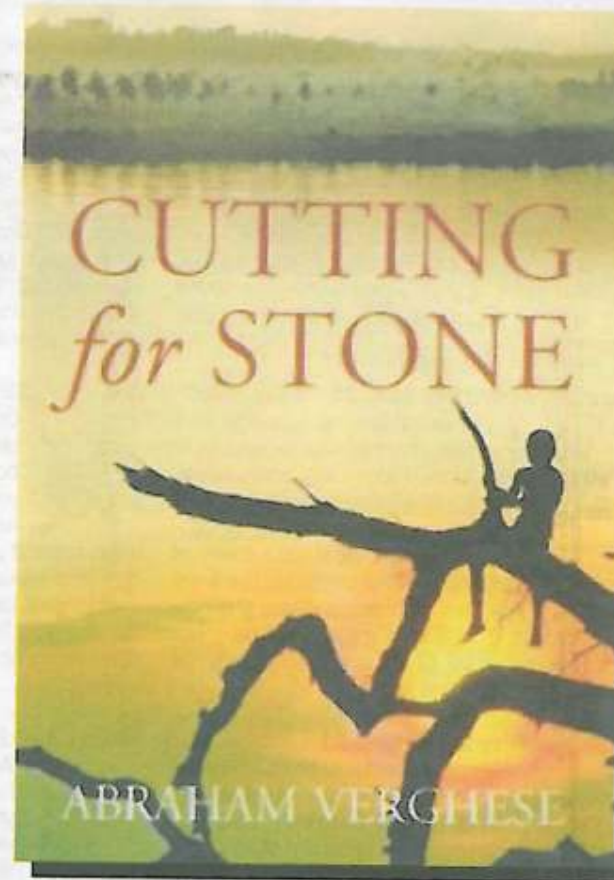
His unfettered imagination gives us a strange tale that is captivating and unforgettable, and brings to the fore the idea that emotional trauma impacts the shape of one's decisions in life and subsequent actions.

The book centres on a highly dramatic storyline, concerning Marion and Shiva Stone – conjoined twin brothers born to a mother who died in labour, and abandoned by their British surgeon father. They grow up in Addis Ababa, raised by their parents' colleagues Hema and Gosh.

As they come of age, Marion's love for Genet, the daughter of the house maid, becomes instrumental to a deep rift that develops between the brothers – one that marks both indelibly.

Throughout the story, Verghese furnishes us with glimpses of the real Ethiopia as experienced on the ground, a land riddled by poverty, hunger and disease, and buttressed by the corruption and greed of the authoritarian leadership.

I kept forgetting that the book is about Ethiopia and not Nigeria, attesting to the



universally devastating legacy of colonialism. How far back could these nations reach to recapture what was once lost and develop a leadership devoid of totalitarianism, corruption and selfishness?

Could uprisings such as that reverberating today in Iran topple the hegemony of the ruling class and enthrone a fairer democracy? *Cutting for Stone* posits such questions, with all the ingredients to fire you up.

When it comes to style, Verghese is at home with words, the narrative beguilingly thrilling with nuggets of

Ethiopian history serving to flavour the plot throughout. This book is a comprehensive depiction of the high and lows of human relations, told in a compelling language imbued with intensely realised details. Verghese ably makes a faraway world very near and real.



Ifedinma Dimbo, originally from Nigeria, is the author of *She Was Foolish? More*

details about her work and the Irish Writers' Exchange can be found at irishwritersexchange.com