



A Bloom of Bones

Allen Morris Jones

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With images as vivid and searing as a cattle brand, this is an exquisitely crafted book, and one to be savored.

The discovery of the remains of a long-missing local man is the hinge that opens the door of Allen Morris Jones's beautifully crafted *A Bloom of Bones*.

From the first time Eli and Chloe meet, there's a spark. After a mesmerizing week together, Chloe follows Eli back to Montana to see if the magic was real. In the meantime, a man's remains are discovered, and now his murder must be solved.

Eli, a self-educated rancher, poet, and veteran, is a wholly believable character. Chloe, far from a chick-lit stereotype, has a rough-around-the-edges personality and a healthy dose of skepticism. When authorities suspect Eli of withholding information about the murder, Chloe hires a private investigator to dig into his past.

The story is told from alternating points of view, Eli's in the first person, Chloe's in the third, and both are distinctive. Eli's narrative sounds like a poet wrote it. When a cloudburst mixes with the clay-rich ground, mud "scrolls" around trees; a mother trying to hold back her daughter's budding sexuality forces her to wear floral-print skirts and "the braids of a sixties folk singer." Chloe's point of view captures the interior back-and-forth of a woman who is emotionally engaged, even if she has doubts about the man whom she has feelings for.

Montana itself has a starring role with its ranch country—cold, dry, unforgiving land, home to hard-bitten men and disappointed women. The book's secondary characters, especially Eli's family, show how thoroughly the environment shapes and tests all who live there, doling out cupfuls of bitterness and measuring out happiness by the teaspoon.

The book unfolds at a leisurely pace, using flashbacks to illuminate and build sympathy for the characters. The murder is solved, but the true emotional climax is Eli's exploration of his past.

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SUSAN WAGGONER (Winter 2017)

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