Clarion Review

General

Waiting for Bones
Donna Cousins
iUniverse
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Five Stars (out of Five)

Sometimes people do not know what they are made of until they're thrown out of their comfort zones. This is the central theme of Donna Cousins' novel *Waiting for Bones*. Two couples on an African safari are abandoned by their guide, Bones, in a strange, wild, and dangerous world. The novel chronicles their search for help and what happens when people are pushed to the limit.

Dividing the book into thirty-six taut chapters, Cousins uses each to build tension in *Waiting for Bones.* The story begins at the point where the guide has just abandoned the safari, and the group is still hopeful he will return. As time goes by, though, they realize that he is gone for good and that they must survive on their own.

The writing in this novel is considered and memorable. The flame of the guide's match is a "comet," and a baobab tree does not simply grow from the earth but "thrusts" forward. Africa is as much a character as the tourists and their guide.

Cousins allows conversations to meander in many directions. The rich dialogue is punctuated by descriptions of the scenery and a look into what the characters are thinking. When the characters sit in silence, the weight of their thoughts is evident.

The novel shifts points of view often, sometimes within the same chapter. This proves disorienting at times. If the perspective were better organized—giving each character a chapter—the shifts would be less jarring. The novel opens and closes with Abby, and this character seems to undergo the most change. It would have made sense to tell the story from her point of view.

Dichotomies are everywhere in this piece: Two sets of couples—each different from the other in terms of relationship, age, and personality—in a strange land. This novel is as much about displacement as it is about events that unfold as the characters wait for Bones. Cousins writes in the opening that "perspective [is] the first casualty of a vast, alien wilderness."

The high caliber of character development is hard to miss. While waiting for Bones, these characters uncover their own personal strengths. A passive Abby begins the piece waiting for a knight in shining armor, but she ends the novel behind the wheel, directing the path of her own future.

Lisa Bower