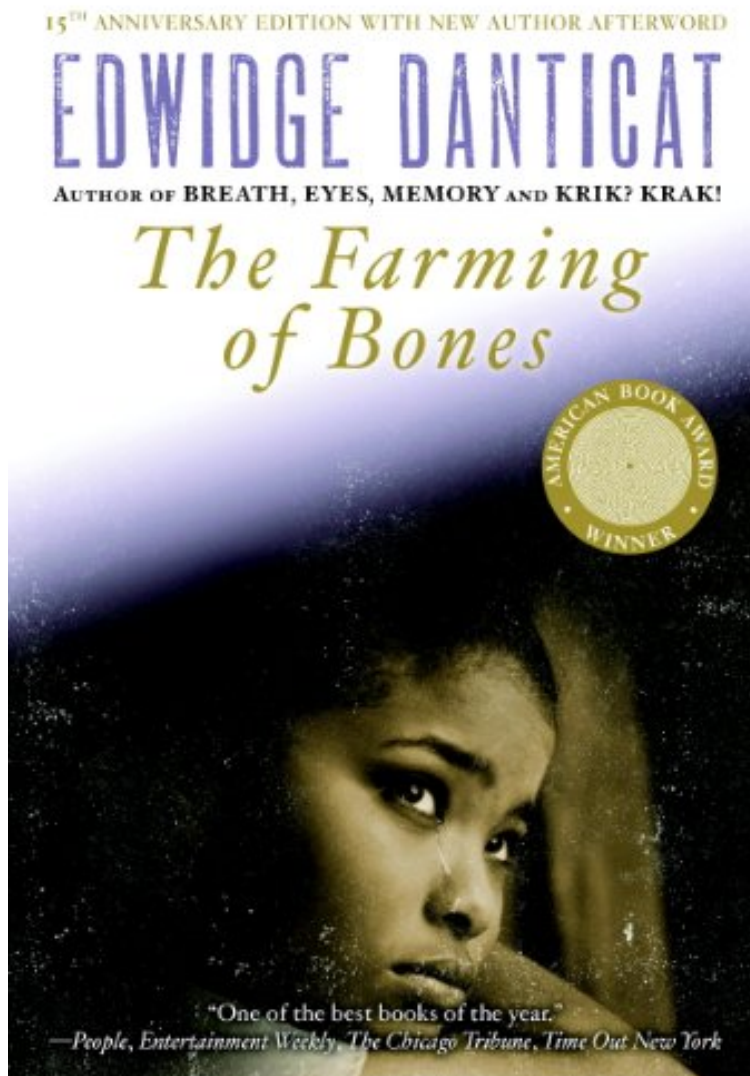


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The Farming of Bones



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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurIt is 1937 and Amabelle Dsir, a young Haitian woman living in the Dominican Republic, has built herself a life as the servant and companion of the wife of a wealthy colonel. She and Sebastien, a cane worker, are deeply in love and plan to marry. But Amabelle's world collapses when a wave of genocidal violence, driven by Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo, leads to the slaughter of Haitian workers. Amabelle and Sebastien are separated, and she desperately flees the tide of violence for a Haiti she barely remembers. Already acknowledged as a classic, this harrowing story of love and survivalfrom one of the most important voices of her generationis an unforgettable memorial to the victims of the Parsley Massacre and a testimony to the power of human memory.From the Trade Paperback edition..comIn a 1930s Dominican Republic village, the scream of a woman in labor rings out like the shot heard around Hispaniola.

Every detail of the birth scene--the balance of power between the middle-aged Seora and her Haitian maid, the babies' skin color, not to mention which child is to survive--reverberates throughout Edwidge Danticat's *Farming of Bones*. In fact, rather than a celebration of fecundity, the unexpected double delivery gels into a metaphor for the military-sponsored mass murder of Haitian emigrants. As the Seora's doctor explains:

"Many of us start out as twins in the belly and do away with the other." But Danticat's powerful second novel is far from a currently modish victimization saga, and can hold its own with such modern classics as

One Hundred Years of Solitude and *The Color Purple*. Its watchful narrator, the Seora's shy Haitian housemaid, describes herself as "one of those sea stones that sucks its colors inside and loses its translucence once it's taken out into the sun." An astute observer of human character, Amabelle Dsir is also a conduit for the author's tart, poetic prose. Her lover, Sebastian, has "arms as wide as one of my bare thighs," while the Seora's complicit officer husband is "still shorter than the average man, even in his military boots." The orphaned Amabelle comes to assume almost messianic proportions, but she is entirely fictional, as is the town of Alegria where the tale begins. The genocide and exodus, however, are factual. Indeed, the atrocities committed by Dominican president Rafael Trujillo's army back in 1937 rival those of Duvalier's *Toutou Macoutes*. History has rendered Trujillo's carnage much less visible than Duvalier's, but no less painful. As Amabelle's father once told her, "Misery won't touch you gentle. It always leaves its thumbprints on you; sometimes it leaves them for others to see, sometimes for nobody but you to know of." Thanks to Danticat's stellar novel, the world will now know. --Jean Lenihan

Extrait 1 His name is Sebastien Onius. He comes most nights to put an end to my nightmare, the one I have all the time, of my parents drowning. While my body is struggling against sleep, fighting itself to awaken, he whispers for me to lie still while I take you back. Back where? I ask without feeling my lips moving. He says, I will take you back into the cave across the river. I lurch at him and stumble, trying to rise. He levels my balance with the tips of his long but curled fingers, each of them alive on its own as they crawl towards me. I grab his body, my head barely reaching the center of his chest. He is lavishly handsome by the dim light of my castor oil lamp, even though the cane stalks have ripped apart most of the skin on his shiny black face, leaving him with crisscrossed trails of furrowed scars. His arms are as wide as one of my bare thighs. They are steel, hardened by four years of sugarcane harvests. Look at you, he says, taking my face into one of his spacious bowl-shaped hands, where the palms have lost their lifelines to the machetes that cut the cane. You are glowing like a Christmas lantern, even with this skin that is the color of driftwood ashes in the rain. Do not say those things to me, I mumble, the shadows of sleep fighting me still. This type of talk makes me feel naked. He runs his hand up and down my back. His rough callused palms nip and chafe my skin, while the string of yellow coffee beans on his bracelet rolls over and caresses the tender places along my spine. Take off your nightdress, he suggests, and be naked for true. When you are uncovered, you will know that you are fully awake and I can simply look at you and be happy. Then he slips across to the other side of the room and watches every movement of flesh as I shed my clothes. He is in a corner, away from the lamp, a shadowed place where he sees me better than I see him. It is good for you to learn and trust that I am near you even when you can't place the balls of your eyes on me, he says. This makes me laugh and laugh loud, too loud for the middle of the night. Now I am fully disrobed and fully awake. I stumble quickly into his arms with my nightdress at my ankles. Thin as he says I am, I am afraid to fold in two and disappear. I'm afraid to be shy, distant, and cold. I am afraid I cease to exist when he's not there. I'm like one of those sea stones that sucks its colors inside and loses its translucence once it's taken out into the sun, out of the froth of the waves. When he's not there, I'm afraid I know no one and no one knows me. Your clothes cover more than your skin, he says. You become this uniform they make for you. Now you are only you, just the flesh. It's either be in a nightmare or be nowhere at all. Or otherwise simply float inside these remembrances, grieving for who I was, and even more for what I've become. But all this when he's not there. Look at your perfect little face, he says, your perfect little shape, your perfect little body, a woman child with deep black skin, all the shades of black in you, what we see and what we don't see, the good and the bad. He touches me like one brush of a single feather, perhaps fearing, too, that I might vanish. Everything in your face is as it should be, he says, your nose where it should be. Oh, well, it would have been sad, I say, if my nose had been placed at the bottom of my feet. This time he is the one who laughs. Up close, his laughter crumples his face, his shoulders rise and fall in an uneven rhythm. I'm never sure whether he is only laughing or also crying at the same time, even though I have never seen him cry. I fall back asleep, draped over him. In the morning, before the first lemongrass-scented ray of sunlight, he is gone. But I can still feel his presence there, in the small square of my room. I can smell his sweat, which is as thick as sugarcane juice when he's worked too much. I can still feel his lips, the eggplant violet gums that taste of greasy goat milk

boiled to candied sweetness with mustard-colored potatoes. I feel my cheeks rising to his dense-as-toenails fingernails, the hollow beneath my cheekbones, where the bracelet nicked me and left a perfectly crescent-moon-shaped drop of dried blood. I feel the wet lines in my back where his tongue gently traced the life-giving veins to the chine, the faint handprints on my waist where he held on too tight, perhaps during some moment when he felt me slipping. And I can still count his breaths and how sometimes they raced much faster than the beating of his heart. When I was a child, I used to spend hours playing with my shadow, something that my father warned could give me nightmares, nightmares like seeing voices twirl in a hurricane of rainbow colors and hearing the odd shapes of things rise up and speak to define themselves. Playing with my shadow made me, an only child, feel less alone. Whenever I had playmates, they were never quite real or present for me. I considered them only replacements for my shadow. There were many shadows, too, in the life I had beyond childhood. At times Sebastien Onius guarded me from the shadows. At other times he was one of them. Births and deaths were my parents' work. I never thought I would help at a birth myself until the screams rang through the valley that morning, one voice like a thousand glasses breaking. I was sitting in the yard, on the grass, sewing the last button on a new indigo-colored shirt I was making for Sebastien when I heard. Dropping the sewing basket, I ran through the house, to the seora's bedroom. Seora Valencia was lying on her bed, her skin rained with sweat and the bottom part of her dress soaking in baby fluid. Her water had broken. As I lifted her legs to remove the sheets, Don Ignacio, Seora Valencia's father, we called him Papi, charged into the room. Standing over her, he tugged at his butterfly-shaped mustache with one age-mottled hand and patted her damp forehead with the other. Ay no! the seora shouted through her clenched grinding teeth. It's too soon. Not for two months yet. Papi and I both took a few steps away when we saw the blood-speckled flow streaming from between his daughter's legs. I will go fetch the doctor, he said. His hide-like skin instantly paled to the color of warm eggshells. As he rushed out the door, he shoved me back towards the seora's bed, as if to say with that abrupt gesture that the situation being what it was, he had no other choice but to trust this only child's life to my inept hands. Thankfully, after Papi left, the seora was still for a moment. Her pain seemed to have subsided a bit. Drowning in the depths of the mattress, she took a few breaths of relief. We sat for a while with her fingers clinging to mine, like when we were girls and we both slept in the same room. Even though she was supposed to sleep in her own canopy bed and I was to sleep on a smaller cot across from hers, she would invite me onto her bed after her father had gone to sleep and the two of us would jump up and down on the mattress, play with our shadows, and pretend we were four happy girls, forcing the housemaid Juanato to come in and threaten to wake Papi who would give us a deeper desire for slumber with a spanking. Amabelle, is the baby's bed ready? With her hand still grasping mine, Seora Valencia glanced at the cradle, squeezed between the louvered patio doors and her favorite armoire deeply carved with giant orchids and hummingbirds in flight. Everything is prepared, Seora, I said. Even though I wasn't used to praying, I whispered a few words to La Virgen de la Carmen that the doctor would come before the seora was in agony again. I want my husband. The seora clamped her eyes shut, quietly forcing the tears down her face. We will send for him, I said. Tell me how your body feels. The pain is less now, but when it comes on strong, it feels like someone shoves a knife into my back. The baby could be leaning on her back, I thought, remembering one of my father's favorite expressions when he and my mother were gathering leaves to cram into rum and firewater bottles before rushing off to a birthing. Without remembering what those leaves were, I couldn't lessen the seora's pain. Yes, there was plenty of rum and firewater in the house, but I didn't want to leave her alone and go to the pantry to fetch them. Anything could happen in my absence, the worst of it being if a lady of her stature had to push that child out alone, like a field hand suddenly feeling her labor pains beneath a tent of cane. Amabelle, I am not going to die, am I? She was shouting at the top of the soft murmuring voice she had since childhood, panting with renewed distress between her words. We were alone in the house now. I had to calm her, to help her, as she had always counted on me to do, as her father had always counted on me to do. Before this, the most pain I ever felt was when a wasp bit the back of my hand and made it swell, she declared. This will pain you more, but not so much more, I said. A soft breeze drifted in through the small gaps in the patio doors. She reached for the mosquito netting tied above her head, seized it, and twisted the cloth. Gooseflesh sprouted all over her arms. She grabbed my wrist so tight that my fingers became numb. If Doctor Javier doesn't come, you'll have to be the one to do this for me! she yelled. I yanked my hands from hers and massaged her arms and taut shoulders to help prepare her body for the birth. Brace yourself, I said. Save your strength for the baby. Virgencita! she shouted at the ceiling as I dragged her house dress above her head. I'm going to think of nothing but you, Virgencita, until this pain becomes a child. Let the air enter and leave your mouth freely, I suggested. I remembered my mother saying that it was

important that the women breathe normally if they wanted to feel less pain. I feel a kind of vertigo, she said, twitching like live flesh on fire. Thrashing on the bed, she gulped desperate mouthfuls of air, even though her face was swelling, the veins throbbing like a drumbeat along her temples. I will not have my baby like this, she said, trying to pin herself to a sunken spot in the middle of the bed. I will not permit anyone to walk in and see me bare, naked. Please, Seora, give this all your attention. At least you'll cover my legs if they come? She grabbed her belly with both hands to greet another surge of pain. I felt the contents of my stomach rise and settle in the middle of my chest when the baby's head entered her canal. Still I felt some relief, even though I know she did not. I told myself, Now I can see a child will truly come of this agony; this is not entirely impossible. In spite of my hopefulness, the baby stopped coming forward and lay at the near end of her birth canal, as though it had suddenly changed its mind and decided not to leave. Numbed by the pain, the seora did not move, either. Seora, it is time, I said. Time for what? she asked, her small rounded teeth hammering her lower lip. Its time to push out your child. I see the head. The hair is dark and soft, in ringlets like yours. She pushed with all her might, like an ant trying to move a tree. The head slipped down, filling my open hand. Seora, this child will be yours, I said to soothe her. You will be its mother for the rest of your days. It will be yours like watercress belongs to water and river lilies belong to the river. Like I belonged to my mother, she chimed in, catching her breath. Now you will know for yourself why they say children are the prize of life. Be quick! she commanded. I want to see it. I want to hold it. I want to know if it is a girl or a boy. Her forehead creased with anticipation. She tightened every muscle and propelled the child's shoulders forward. The infant's body fell into my arms, covering my house apron with blood. You have a son. I proudly raised the child from between her legs and held him up so she could see. The umbilical cord stretched from inside her as I cradled the boy child against my chest. I wiped him clean with an embroidered towel that I'd cut and stitched myself soon after I'd learned of the conception. I rapped twice on his bottom but he did not cry. It was Seora Valencia who cried instead. I always thought it would be a girl, she said. Every Sunday when I came out of Mass, all the little boys would crowd around my belly as though they were in love with her. Like Seora Valencia, her son was coconut-cream colored, his cheeks and forehead the blush pink of water lilies. Is he handsome? Are all his fingers and toes there? she asked. I don't think I heard him cry. I thought I would leave it to you to strike him again. I felt a sense of great accomplishment as I tore a white ribbon from one of the cradle pillows, wrapped it around the umbilical cord, then used one of the seora's husband's shaving blades to sever the boy from his mother. Seora Valencia was opening her arms to take him when a yell came. Not from him, but from her. A pained squawk from the back of her throat. It starts again! she screamed. What do you feel, Seora? The birth pains again. It is your baby's old nest, forcing its way out, I said, remembering one of my mother's favorite expressions. The baby's old nest took its time coming out. It was like another child altogether. You have to push once more to be certain it all leaves you. She pushed even harder than before. Another head of curly black hair slid down between her legs, swimming out with the afterbirth. I hurried to put her son down in the cradle and went back to fetch the other child. I was feeling more experienced now. Reaching in the same way, I pulled out the head. The tiny shoulders emerged easily, then the scraggly legs. The firstborn wailed as I drew another infant from between Seora Valencia's thighs. A little girl gasped for breath, a thin brown veil, like layers of spiderwebs, covering her face. The umbilical cord had curled itself in a bloody wreath around her neck, encircling every inch between her chin and shoulders. Seora Valencia tore the caul from her daughter's face with her fingers. I used the blade to snip the umbilical cord from around her neck and soon the little girl cried, falling into a chorus with her brother. Its a curse, isn't it? the seora said, taking her daughter into her arms. A caul, and the umbilical cord too. She gently blew her breath over her daughter's closed eyes, encouraging the child to open them. I took the little boy out of the cradle now and brought him over to the bed to be near his mother and sister. The two babies stopped crying when we rubbed the soles of their feet together. Seora Valencia used the clean end of a bedsheet to wipe the blood off her daughter's skin. The girl appeared much smaller than her twin, less than half his already small size. Even in her mother's arms, she lay on her side with her tiny legs pulled up to her belly. Her skin was a deep bronze, between the colors of nut shells and black salsify. Seora Valencia motioned for me to move even closer with her son. They differ in appearance. She wanted another opinion. Your son favors your cherimoya milk color, I said. And my daughter favors you, she said. My daughter is a chameleon. She's taken your color from the mere sight of your face. Her fingers still trembling, she made the sign of the holy cross from her forehead down to the sweaty cave between her swollen breasts. It was an especially hot morning. The air was heavy with the scent of lemongrass and flame trees losing their morning dew to the sun and with the smell of all the blood the seora had lost to her children. I refastened the closed patio doors, completely shutting out the

outsideair. Will you light a candle to La Virgencita, Amabelle? I promised her I would do this after I gave birth. I lit a white candle and set it on the layette chest beside the cradle that had been the seora's own as a child. Do you think the children will love me? she asked. Don't you already love them? I feel as if they've always been here. Do you know what you will name them? I think I'll name my daughter Rosalinda Teresa to honor my mother. I'll leave it to my husband to name our son. Amabelle, I'm so happy today. You and me. Look at what we have done. It was you, Seora. You did this. How does my daughter look? How do you find my dusky rose? Does she please you? Do they please you? She's so small. Take her, please, and let me hold my son now. We exchanged children. For a moment Rosalinda seemed to be floating between our hands, in danger of falling. I looked into her tiny face, still streaked with her mother's blood, and I cradled her more tightly in my arms. Amabelle do you think my daughter will always be the color she is now? Seora Valencia asked. My poor love, what if she's mistaken for one of your people?