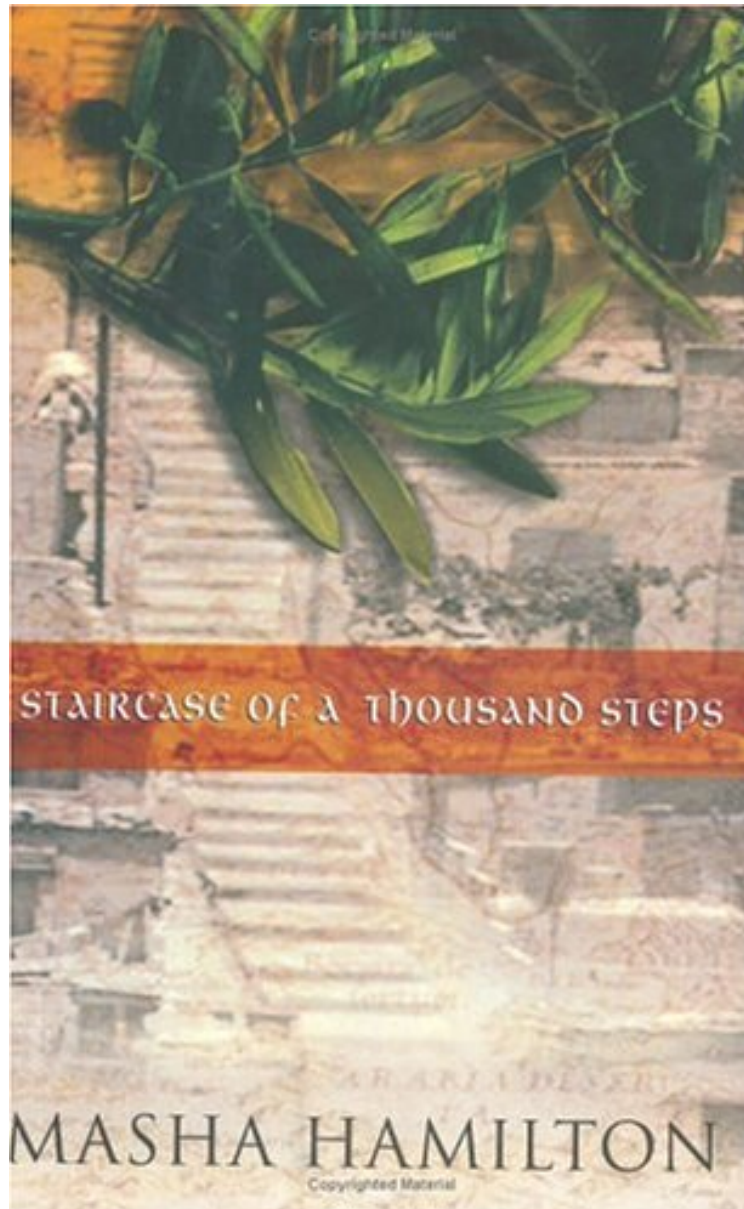


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Staircase of a Thousand Steps

Masha Hamilton

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Masha Hamilton : Staircase of a Thousand Steps before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Staircase of a Thousand Steps:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. The weight of loss under a desert sunBy Luan GainesIn the small village of Ein Fadr, just before the advent of the 1967 Israeli war, the world has hardly changed for centuries. The

villagers live as if their ancestors still walk among them, nothing forgotten in the long history of generations that tread round and round, in the same deliberate path. Jammaana wishes to see her grandfather, drawn to him by recurring dream's of her mother's difficult birth. Soon to leave Egypt for America, Rafa, takes her daughter across the desert miles for a last visit. She leaves Jammaana in the care of her grandfather, Harif, and her great-aunt Khalah, of the gentle hands, as well as the village midwife, Faridah, who assisted in Rafa's delivery many years ago. The midwife is the one person Jammaana secretly wants to question, because Faridah is also in the dream and Jammaana had known and loved her all her young life. The very familiarity of Faridah is comforting to the child, her smells, her habits, her gathering of herbs to treat villager's ailments. When Harif's wife dies during her second confinement, Harif is at last free to be with the true and lasting love of his heart. Harif will be ostracized by this union of unequals, so, sacrificing her future, Faridah refuses his offer; they remain dear friends, but never man and wife. Over the years their bonds strengthen, allowing them a closeness that they treasure. But there is trouble brewing in this small village, as the ancestors seem to crowd upon their living relatives, and secrets are uncovered while old hostilities are rekindled. Ein Fadr is beset with petty complaints and jealousies and Harif finds himself accused of duplicity and no longer trusted. But he has troubles of his own, too preoccupied to worry about gossip, as the tension increases. Jammaana continues to be haunted by her vivid dreams, anxious for Faridah and her grandfather, confused by the unsettled air of the village, where time passes but nothing changes. Finally, for Harif and Jammaana everything changes, as the hot desert sun holds everything motionless in its fierce and unflinching gaze. 24 of 25 people found the following review helpful. A Work of Genius By A Customer Rarely have I have read a novel as compelling as "Staircase of a Thousand Steps." The writing is as good as writing gets. The plot draws us into the magical life of a Primordial Village (a fictional Palestinian/Islamic town) during the years 1929-1967, a place revealed through three protagonists, a handful of other figures, each unique. Here: past, present and future intersect through fine imagery and almost perfect prose. "Staircase" is rich with visual, emotional and sensuous details, reveals how complex ancestral relationships explode in surprising ways. I strongly suggest that you do Not miss this powerful reading experience, a book that reminds us why we read. A first novel? Truly Hard to Believe!!! 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars By seurchin A beautiful read

Set in Transjordan just before the 1967 war with Israel, Staircase of a Thousand Steps is a "remarkably well-written...thoroughly absorbing novel" (Arizona Daily Sun) that takes us to a place where memory whispers like fear, where visions of a long-ago forbidden love affair haunt a precocious young girl and where the flare of old rivalries can be as sudden as searing as the desert wind.

From Publishers Weekly A precocious 11-year-old girl experiences an unsettling coming of age in a Jordanian village in this engaging first novel. Jammaana, who possesses an ancestral gift that allows her to see the past, travels with her mother, Rafa, against her father's wishes, to Rafa's birthplace, the ancient village of Ein Fadr. It is 1966, and the desert region simmers with ethnic and religious tensions helicopters and military patrols are as much a part of the terrain as sand dunes and camels. In Ein Fadr a tightly knit group of families have lived together for generations, donkeys serve as transportation and the rule of Allah is strictly observed. Rafa's father, Harif, is a shepherd with his own psychic gift; he and Faridah, the village midwife, are much loved by Jammaana. Harif's often disturbing prophecies have made him a suspicious figure in town, and Faridah has her own troubles as an independent woman. As Jammaana attempts to understand the past, Harif and Faridah weave tales that bring long-buried secrets to light. When Rafa leaves her husband and hides in the caves above the village, tragedy strikes. Jammaana who can't decide if she is cursed or blessed with her growing powers is forced to decide her loyalties and learn what betrayal means. Hamilton is a natural storyteller: she weaves past and present artfully together, the narrative moves at a good clip and the mysticism throughout is rendered believably. Readers eager for a much different take on small-town hurts and rivalries will be intrigued by how these elements play out in this sheltered corner of the world. (May 21) Forecast: This is one of four first novels kicking off Penguin's BlueHen imprint, which aims to bring literary fiction to a wider audience. The editors have made a wise choice with this debut, though a drab jacket may deflect browsers. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc. From Library Journal Young Jammaana, a principal character of Hamilton's eloquent first novel, possesses a familial gift that enables her to experience others' memories. Her grandfather displays an equally intuitive gift, allowing him to glimpse the future. Because of the mixed blessings their ancestral aptitude begets, they are, along with two others, outsiders in their fictional village. The others the older midwife, Faridah, and Jammaana's mother, Rafa do not readily accept the conventional wisdom regarding the acceptable behavior of Muslim women, especially as decreed within the Transjordanian village of Ein Fadr, this narrative's setting. At the novel's end, Grandfather exhorts Jammaana to remember that "Past and future are no more separate than the tree trunk from its branches." His statement confirms much about the inevitable and often perilous clash of established customs with modern or unfamiliar ways, resulting in a tension that Hamilton movingly and beautifully expresses throughout this superior debut. Highly recommended. Faye A. Chadwell, Univ. of Oregon Lib., Eugene Copyright 2001 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Booklist Jammaana, a young girl in a Middle Eastern desert village, can recall the memories of others. Seeking the meaning of her visions of the past, she uncovers such secrets as her grandfather's

secret passion for the village midwife, the midwife's guilty wish that Jammana's mother hadn't been born, and the identity of the midwife's murderer. As Jammana struggles to understand the adults' secrets, she unwittingly sows the seeds of her family's destruction. Focusing on themes of love, betrayal, friendship, and duty, Hamilton shows how each generation's decisions create a web that ensnares the next. The prose is simple but elegant, and subtle interweaving of the mystical and the mundane makes the novel delightfully compelling. Bonnie JohnstonCopyright American Library Association. All rights reserved