



The Distance Between Us

Masha Hamilton

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About the Book

An exclusive interview with an elusive Lebanese crime king and thug – the kind of opportunity that every journalist lives for in the war-torn Middle East. But for Caddie Blair and her colleagues en route to just such an assignment, things are off-balance from the start. Not long into the trip, their Land Rover is ambushed by a band of radical militiamen, and photojournalist Marcus Lancour – Caddie's colleague, friend, and lover – is shot and killed in an assignment gone awry.

So begins this engaging account of an impassioned journalist who believes that getting the story – while remaining detached from the situation and the people involved – is everything. As Caddie says, if you get too close, you feel too much. And when you feel too much, you're sunk.

But her world soon begins to unravel when these long-held beliefs in objectivity and fairness ultimately lead to great personal loss. What follows is a sometimes unsettling yet always compassionate look at Caddie's tenuous struggle between a desire for revenge and freedom from the guilt she feels for having survived as she learns to incorporate her losses and recast her life.

In her latest novel, Masha Hamilton, a seasoned journalist herself, gives readers an insider's perspective about the decisions that war correspondents sometimes face and the impact these decisions have on their lives. *The Distance Between Us* allows readers to reconsider their own judgments and views about reporting, knowing that objectivity and detachment often come at a substantial cost.

About the Author

Masha Hamilton is no stranger to foreign conflicts. As a foreign correspondent for a decade, she has chronicled events overseas, first working for the Associated Press in the Middle East and then later, in Moscow, reporting for the Los Angeles Times, writing a newspaper column, and reporting for NBC/Mutual Radio. Hamilton covered the intefadeh, the peace process, and the partial Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon as well as the coup and collapse of the Soviet Union, the growing independence in Soviet republics, and Kremlin politics. Early in 2004, she worked in Afghanistan as a freelance journalist.

Hamilton lives with her family in New York City and teaches for Gotham Writers' Workshop. Her debut novel, *Staircase of a Thousand Steps*, was a Book Sense 76 Pick and Barnes & Noble Discover Great New Writers selection.

Discussion

1. The essence of this book is in its title. Distance exists in the political landscape of this novel as well as in Caddie's life. What are some of the historical and cultural differences that create distance between the Palestinians and the Jews in this story? How does creating distance influence Caddie's relationship with Marcus? her professional colleagues? her friends? her community? herself?
2. In an instant, Caddie loses the two elements of her life most dear to her: Marcus and her professional detachment. How has reporting about violence in the past affected her?
3. After Marcus's death, Caddie finds herself drawn closer and closer to dangerous situations, putting herself at increasingly greater personal and professional risk, as if she were invincible. What drives this reckless behavior? What other professions encourage similar forms of escape? Does escaping become addictive?
4. What is behind Caddie's strong attraction to Goronsky? From the beginning, he is not honest with her yet she continues to rely on him.

5. Lingering thoughts of revenge plague Caddie. Did you expect this? How do her experiences with Goronsky, Avraham, Halima, and others affect her attitude?

6. The female characters in this novel – including Ya'el, Sarah, Halima, Anya – are diverse women who represent many cultures and values. How does each affect Caddie's actions and influence her decisions?

7. Memories of Marcus's death haunt Caddie. Is she in any way responsible for his death, or is she struggling with her own guilt for surviving the ambush? How does Marcus's journal – and perhaps his death – help her to heal?

8. Sarah tells Caddie, "Two kinds of people find their way to this place. Those who leave, and those who stay." Does Caddie's decision to stay surprise you? Will her personal and professional losses reshape her reporting style?

9. This fictional account of violence in the Middle East parallels many real-life, contemporary scenarios, both at home and abroad (for example, the war in Iraq, September 11, Columbine High School, Kosovo, Sarajevo, and Sudan). What motivates the kind of coverage given to these events? Is the reporting informative or voyeuristic, merely feeding the general public's appetite for violence?

10. This book is dedicated to Kevin Carter, a photojournalist who won a Pulitzer Prize for his disturbing photo of the famine in Sudan. In the picture, a gaunt Sudanese child crouches low to the ground while a vulture lurks nearby. Not long after winning the Pulitzer, Carter took his life. As a strict observer, journalists sometimes may have to let violence and brutality occur because if they become involved, they may change the outcome of the event or the public's understanding of a situation. Are there situations when a journalist should become a participant or is it better to remain an observer?

Recommended Reading

Robert Stone. *Damascus Gate* (1998)

Anita Diamant. *The Red Tent* (1997)

Fadia Faqir. *Pillars of Salt* (1996)

Alexandra Fuller. *Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight: An African Childhood* (2003)

Masha Hamilton. *Staircase of a Thousand Steps* (2001)

Francesca Marciano. *Rules of the Wild* (1998)

Azar Nafisi. *Reading Lolita in Tehran* (2003)

Henry Scholder. *The Honorable Correspondent* (2003)

Praise for *The Distance Between Us*

“Engaging from first page to last.... I could endlessly quote passages of glorious prose from this book, but won't. I'll let readers discover Hamilton's gifted way with words for themselves. The author has given us the scents, sights, and sounds of Jerusalem, the sorrows shared by Israeli and Arab cousins. And she's put starkly realistic faces on human weaknesses and strengths. Unbridled Books has picked a winner here.”

– Laurel Johnson, *Midwest Book Review*

“What a powerful, intense, beautifully written story. Masha Hamilton takes us right into the brutal heart of the war zone, right into the guarded heart of journalist Caddie Blair. With spare and stunning prose, Hamilton reminds us that the distance between us often isn't as great as we may think.”

– Gayle Brandeis, author of *The Book of Dead Birds*, winner of Barbara Kingsolver's Bellwether Prize for Fiction in Support of a Literature of Social Change

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