



# On the Winding Stair: Stories (American Readers Series #12)

*Joanna Howard*

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“Howard (*In the Colorless Round*) upends some traditional literary conventions in these 14 tales of startling description and beauty. Her settings are bucolic, such as an abandoned farm house, a hilltop mansion and the ruins of a cider mill, each depicted in romantic language ('in a lavender twilight'). In the first story, 'Light Carried on Air Moves Less,' a waiflike beauty stumbles upon an erotic book and apes the illustrations, all the while being watched by a curious 'specter.' In 'Captive Girl for Cobbled Horsemen,' the author plays on the 19th-century captive narrative, while 'Seascape' tinkers with the maritime ghost story by featuring a widow who gradually comes to love the captain depicted in a painting. Many of the stories simply showcase lush, serene description, such as 'The Scent of Apples,' in which a recluse tends to his apple orchard, spied on adoringly by his orphan ward. The last story, 'The Tartan Detective,' features all the necessary accoutrements of detective fiction (even 'the listening mechanism concealed in a potted fern!'). Howard's sensuous prose is to be savored for its own sake.”—*Publishers Weekly*

“Joanna Howard’s short stories flit about like phantoms—just as her characters are ethereal and haunting, her stories are framed by an aura of mystery and romance, with fleeting peaks of action. The 14 stories in *On the Winding Stair* range from a vignette of an encounter to a 'novel in shorts' that encompasses several generations. Howard imbues all her tales with dream-like action and sidelong description, which creates a haze around the narrative that, rather than disorient, lulls the reader into her sometimes euphoric, sometimes tragic world. Her careful and practiced dismissal of the concrete allows the reader release from conventional concerns of plot and conflict, and ultimately celebrates the unknowable.”—*Verse*

In her debut short story collection, **Joanna Howard** bends the expectations and cliches of mainstream mystery and paranormal writing to bring new surprises and intelligence to the genre. Rebecca Brown says, “These words are dreams or visions, fantasies, letters of things that are not quite love, buffooneries and comedies, scenarios from horror films you are afraid you'll one day see.” Howard joins Kelly Link and Shelley Jackson in redefining genre writing for a new audience.

**Joanna Howard** holds a PhD in creative writing from the University of Denver and an MFA from Bowling Green State University. She teaches fiction writing at Brown University.

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