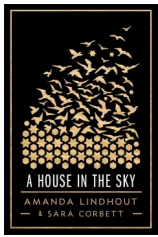


# A House in the Sky



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This memoir is as compelling as any thriller, and much better written than most. In it a young Canadian describes how she escaped her family's poverty and dysfunction in a small town in Alberta by reading *National Geographic* mags cover to cover. The family was so poor that she had to earn money to buy the used magazines herself, but while reading them she not only discovered the world, but was able to dream of a better, more interesting life.

Amanda didn't have the money for college, so instead she became a waitress at high-end clubs and restaurants in Calgary when the money from oil and gas was flowing. She soon began to travel internationally to South America, India, Pakistan, and Nepal. Edgy, dangerous places appealed to her and those far off the tourist track. She went to

Pakistan where she was robbed at knifepoint of all her money at a bizarre. She dreamed of going to Afghanistan and Iraq although wars were being fought in both places.

While visiting those two countries, she met foreign correspondents and photographers. One Australian photographer, Nigel, became her travel mate and boyfriend. She decided she could take photos too and sell them. Soon she had a few minor writing gigs and became a television stringer for an Iranian broadcasting company.

Somali, "the most dangerous place in the world" called to her. She talked Nigel into travelling with her there although they were no longer a couple. But on the fourth day, outside Mogadishu, they were both kidnapped and held for ransom. Thus began fifteen months of captivity under harsh and extremely dangerous conditions.

Although she never says this, Amanda was incredibly naïve. She had experienced one previous kidnapping in Iraq, where she was only taken for a few hours and paid her own ransom. For some reason, she thought she had the wits to be safe in Somalia as well. And even though her only assignment was as a weekly stringer for *The Red Deer Advocate* (a small Canadian newspaper), she entered the country.

At this point, the memoir becomes a prison story. Amanda was raped repeatedly and fed almost nothing. Nigel was in the same room with her for a time, but then when they both converted to Islam, they were separated. Both suffered immensely. Both the Canadian and Australian governments refused to pay ransom. Gradually, their families became involved in raising money privately.

During her captivity, Amanda is always learning: the Koran, Arabic, and how to read the moods and personalities of her guards. The men--most were only teens--were extremely poor and waiting for the big pay-out. During the year, Amanda learned to have compassion for them because they grew up in a war-torn world full of violence. Indeed, her experience in captivity led her to a new vocation, that of foundation work.

This is not a happy book but one that teaches you about humanity. It is incredibly personal and very well-written. Journalist Sara Corbett co-wrote it. The house in the sky is a special beautiful place Amanda retreated to when the violence and pain of her captivity became almost too much to bear. You can share it with her pain-free.

Posted by Dory L. on November 21, 2013

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