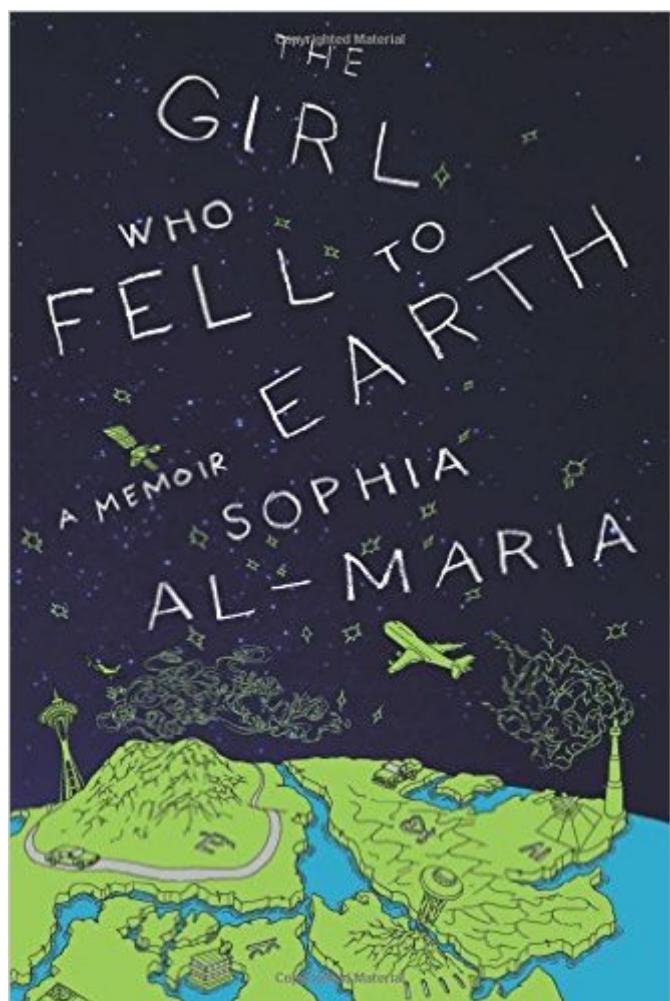


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The Girl Who Fell To Earth: A Memoir



Synopsis

Award-winning filmmaker and writer Sophia Al-Maria's The Girl Who Fell to Earth is a funny and wry coming-of-age memoir about growing up in between American and Gulf Arab cultures. With poignancy and humor, Al-Maria shares the struggles of being raised by an American mother and Bedouin father while shuttling between homes in the Pacific Northwest and the Middle East. Part family saga and part personal quest, The Girl Who Fell to Earth traces Al-Maria's journey to make a place for herself in two different worlds.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

When Sophia Al-Maria's father was a boy his family still lived a traditional Bedouin lifestyle, traveling around the deserts of Qatar and Saudi Arabia and sleeping in tents under skies dark enough to be filled with stars. After being forced by boundary-loving authorities to settle in a gender-segregated family compound her father's wanderlust remained, which is how he ended up in Seattle unable to speak English but still managing to meet and marry an American girl, giving Al-Maria the dual or maybe triple or even quadruple cultural heritage that makes this memoir so mind expansingly and eye openingly interesting. Al-Maria spent part of her childhood in her grandmother's small, isolated house in rural Washington state, where the protective paranoia of her mother made Al-Maria feel more trapped than when she stayed in her father's crowded multi-generational and now stationery home in Qatar. Even though while in Qatar there were substantial cultural and religious restrictions on her ability to move around freely and meet with whomever she wanted, being part of a larger

family crowd felt liberating.

Sophia Al-Maria's memoir, "The Girl Who Fell to Earth," opens in the Arabian Peninsula in 1969. A Bedouin boy named Matar, of the Al-Dafira tribe, is mesmerized by a portable television that the members of his tiny settlement watch communally. When Matar is eighteen, he announces to his mother that he is going to Seattle, Washington. The fact that he speaks no English does not deter him. He dons a ridiculous "used polyester suit" (the slacks are salmon pink), flies to America, and ends up in a Tacoma, Washington bowling alley. There he meets Gale Valo, who happens to be sitting around waiting for a cousin. Improbably, these two people, who have nothing in common, end up marrying and having children, one of whom is the author. Gale, who grew up on a farm in the Puyallup Valley, where her mother, Sophia, still lived, had no idea what she was getting into when she set her cap for Matar. Only later does Gale realize that she and her husband, whose background, language, and customs are radically different, could not realistically expect to live happily ever after. Not only does Matar insist that Gale convert to Islam, but he returns to the Gulf to seek his fortune. Gale and the kids eventually join him in Qatar, a move that proves disastrous. She says in a telephone call to her mother from the capital city of Doha, "I keep thinking this is how it must be for astronauts. All cooped up for months on end, not knowing which way is up." "The Girl Who Fell to Earth" is about Sophia's efforts to fit in either in Qatar or Washington. When she was five and saw a video that her father sent from overseas, Sophia said, "having a second world to belong to immediately made me cast doubt on my place in the first.

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