

PRESS RELEASE

New Book: The Dancing Girl and the Turtle

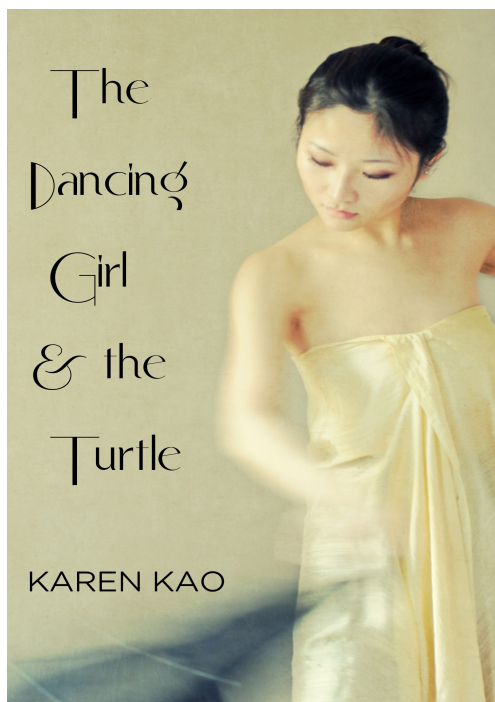
Author: Karen Kao

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A rape. A war. A society where women are bought and sold but no one can speak of shame. Shanghai 1937. Violence throbs at the heart of this powerful new novel.

This elegant novel breaks barriers with its brutally honest account of the courtesan culture in 1930s Shanghai. In a searing portrayal of women as commodities, Song Anyi, a rebellious young woman, is thwarted by her conventional family, the social mores of the day and the war with the Japanese that is about to engulf China.



Rarely does a novel enter so deeply into the world of the Chinese who lived and died in Shanghai. Using language spare and taut, this novel captures a complex and cruel society.

Karen Kao writes: 'There is violence in this novel, just as there is violence in the lives of many women. Anyi is the voice of every woman denied a place at the table and every girl whose shame led her to self-harm.'

Synopsis

On the road to Shanghai, Song Anyi is raped and left for dead. The family silence and shame that meet her courageous survival drive Anyi to escalating self-harm and prostitution. From opium dens to high-class brothels, Anyi dances on the edge of destruction while China prepares for war with Japan.

The Dancing Girl and the Turtle is one of four interlocking novels set in Shanghai from 1929 to 1954, collectively entitled *The Shanghai Quartet*.

Extracts

The birds wheel away, cawing for help. The man tears my garments, scraping each layer away until I am a fish with no scales, flailing on the chopping board. The boys know what to do. They each take an arm. The man takes my legs.

‘Cover her face,’ he growls and the boys obey. Dead leaves fill my mouth, strangely sweet.

* * *

The girls here are so young. One of them twines her fingers into mine, her hand so small I could crush it. There are more of them in the ballroom, standing well outside the pools of light that demarcate the dancing from the sitting, the illusion from reality. Manager Lin barks and the child shuffles away into her position close to the exit. Her dress is simple but expensive, a sheath that a man can easily pull over her head with one hand or simply bunch at the waist if he were in a hurry.

* * *

He placed her in the centre of the large room. He measured with his eyes the distance to the wall. He calculated speed, trajectory and flight. He clenched his fist and drove it hard into the middle of her chest.

She was lighter than he thought and the blow sent her crashing against the wall. For a moment, she lay crumpled on the floor and Tanizaki wondered if she might be dead but no. Dazed and pale, she struggled to her feet and walked punch-drunk back to her position.

Again he struck her, this time with his open palm, a crack against her rounded belly like the sound of a whip. She fell onto her back, her mouth gaping for air like a fish that doesn’t yet know there’s a hook sunk deep in its throat.

Once more she stood. A thin ribbon of blood trickled from the side of her mouth. Her tongue darted out to taste it.

‘Come here!’ Tanizaki screamed and Anyi obeyed. He liked that in her. He liked it very much.