

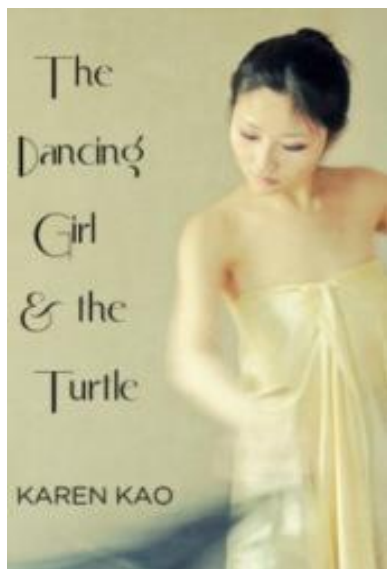
# The Dancing Girl and the Turtle by Karen Kao

Linen Press, 2017

## Seduction and Betrayal in Pre-War China

Shanghai, 1937. During the opulent days before the Second World War, 18-year-old Anyi travels to the city determined to make her fortune. Raped and left for dead on the journey, this is the story of her battle for survival in a culture where all a woman has is her fragile reputation.

*'The rain has stopped and the street gleams like the barrel of a rifle.'*



As an intelligent young lady from wealthy parents, Anyi has always been frustrated by polite society's stifling attitudes towards women. Deeply traumatised by the vicious attack, she is taken in by her aunt and uncle who rush to arrange her marriage before what they consider to be her shameful secret is revealed.

Referred to from the beginning as 'the broken girl,' Anyi defiantly reinvents herself as a glamorous siren able to wrap men around her little finger. Captivatingly beautiful, she inspires lust and jealousy in equal measure.

Against the odds, she becomes a successful dancer earning enough money to live independently. In the dazzling world of the dancehalls, she is worshipped by diplomats and playboys alike as she embraces her new lavish and amoral celebrity lifestyle.

*'We, the dancing girls, are the gazelles who draw the predators out of the high grass. The whores are the dead meat to be flung to the lions.'*

But in secret she is plagued by visions of the soldiers who violated her and at night their ghosts line her bedroom wall. In a desperate attempt to block out the memories, she seeks release by allowing paying men to abuse her. At times a painful read featuring unflinching references to physical and emotional cruelty, *The Dancing Girl and the Turtle* is a sensitive portrayal of the devastating impact of sexual violence.

It is also a brutally honest account of the seedier side of Shanghai as the flashbulbs of the paparazzi thinly veil the opium-addled, oppressive courtesan sub-culture. Anyi's most powerful customer, the charming Japanese diplomat Mr Tanikazi, finds her eagerness to satisfy his particular taste for violence irresistible. Political tensions mount in the buildup to the Japanese invasion as the world teeters on the edge of war. Secret desires overflow into real life as people's public and private faces are threatened with exposure.

*'The city amazed and disgusted him. Perversion was available on any street corner of Shanghai.'*

The story is narrated by multiple characters and everyone from family members to downtrodden servants is given a voice. The human need for intimacy and understanding is apparent on every page and the reader is offered a vivid picture of events from different points of view. Progressive attitudes collide with old customs in a world tentatively embracing modernity yet still steeped in tradition. Gripping and complex, this challenging read provides an intensely detailed, often harrowing but ultimately sympathetic insight into a lost culture.

## **About the publisher**

The Linen Press is an independent publishing house founded by Lynn Michell and run 'by women, for women'. They aim to promote talented female writers producing unique work in a range of genres about relatable issues that matter to women today. Mitchell explains: 'I want to read beautifully crafted writing that speaks to women. I want to fall into a novel and not emerge until its ending'. New writing is carefully selected based on merit and writers are fully supported and developed.

## **About the writer**

Becky Danks is an avid reader, creative writer, dog lover, book reviewer, and occasional poet. She was recently shortlisted for the Verve Poetry Prize 2017. Follow her on Twitter: @BeckyD123. Website: [www.beckydanks.com](http://www.beckydanks.com).