



The Courtesan: A Novel

Alexandra Curry

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A timeless novel of one woman who bridged two worlds in a tumultuous era of East meets West

The Courtesan is an astonishing tale inspired by the real life of a woman who lived and loved in the extraordinary twilight decades of the Qing dynasty. To this day, Sai Jinhua is a legend in her native land of China, and this is her story, told the way it might have been.

The year is 1881. Seven-year-old Jinhua is left an orphan, alone and unprotected after her mandarin father's summary execution for the crime of speaking the truth. For seven silver coins, she is sold to a brothel-keeper and subjected to the worst of human nature. Will the private ritual that is her father's legacy and the wise friendship of the crippled brothel maid be enough to sustain her?

When an elegant but troubled scholar takes Jinhua as his concubine, she enters the close world of his jealous first wife. Yet it is Jinhua who accompanies him--as Emissary to the foreign devil nations of Prussia, Austro-Hungary, and Russia--on an exotic journey to Vienna. As he struggles to play his part in China's early, blundering diplomatic engagement with the western world, Jinhua's eyes and heart are opened to the irresistible possibilities of a place that is mesmerizing and strange, where she will struggle against the constraints of tradition and her husband's authority and seek to find "Great Love."

Sai Jinhua is an altered woman when she returns to a changed and changing China, where a dangerous clash of cultures pits East against West. The moment arrives when Jinhua's western sympathies will threaten not only her own survival, but the survival of those who are most dear to her.

A book that shines a small light on the large history of China's relationship with the West, *The Courtesan* is a novel that distills, with the economy of a poem, a woman's journey of untold miles to discern what is real and abiding.

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