



The Russian Concubine

By Kate Furnivall

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A sweeping novel set in war-torn 1928 China, with a star-crossed love story at its center.

In a city full of thieves and Communists, danger and death, spirited young Lydia Ivanova has lived a hard life. Always looking over her shoulder, the sixteen-year-old must steal to feed herself and her mother, Valentina, who numbered among the Russian elite until Bolsheviks murdered most of them, including her husband. As exiles, Lydia and Valentina have learned to survive in a foreign land.

Often, Lydia steals away to meet with the handsome young freedom fighter Chang An Lo. But they face danger: Chiang Kai Shek's troops are headed toward Junchow to kill Reds like Chang, who has in his possession the jewels of a tsarina, meant as a gift for the despot's wife. The young pair's all-consuming love can only bring shame and peril upon them, from both sides. Those in power will do anything to quell it. But Lydia and Chang are powerless to end it.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

The experiences of the author's mother inspired this debut novel, a somewhat improbable tale of star-crossed love in 1928 China. Valentina Ivanova and her 16-year-old daughter, Lydia, White Russian refugees, live in grinding poverty in the International Settlement of Junchow, subsisting off whatever presents Valentina can charm from gentlemen admirers and the profits Lydia makes from pawning stolen goods. When Lydia inadvertently attracts the unwelcome attentions of a criminal gang, the Black Snakes, she finds a rescuer in Chang An Lo, an English-speaking Communist and kung fu master. Danger is never far as the two fall in love. Lydia's travails are mirrored by those of Theo Willoughby, the British headmaster of her school. Theo's struggle to preserve his school and his happy life with his Chinese mistress, Li Mei, drives him to collude with Li Mei's estranged father—the leader of the Black Snakes—to run opium into Junchow. Violence is more prevalent (and graphic) than sex, and the narrative has extended periods of inertia during which there is much action, but not of the plot-advancing sort. Despite these flaws, Furnivall vividly evokes Lydia's character and personal struggles against a backdrop of depravity and corruption. (Aug.)

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About the Author

Kate Furnivall was born in Wales and currently lives in Devon, England. Married and the mother of two sons, she has worked in publishing and television advertising. She drew inspiration for *The Russian Concubine* from her mother's experiences as a White Russian refugee in China.

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