



The Woman in the Camphor Trunk: An Anna Blanc Mystery

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Los Angeles, 1908. In Chinatown, the most dangerous beat in Los Angeles, police matron Anna Blanc and her former sweetheart, Detective Joe Singer, discover the body of a white missionary woman, stuffed in a trunk in the apartment of her Chinese lover. Her lover has fled. If news gets out that a white woman was murdered in Chinatown, there will be a violent backlash against the Chinese. Joe and Anna plan to solve the crime quietly and keep the death a secret. So does good-looking Mr. Jones, a prominent Chinese leader who has mixed feelings about helping the LAPD and about Anna.

Meanwhile, the Hop Sing tong has kidnapped two slave girls from the Bing Kong tong, fuelling existing tensions. They are poised on the verge of a bloody tong war that would put all Chinatown residents in danger.

Joe orders Anna out of Chinatown to keep her safe, but to atone for her own family's sins, Anna must stay to solve the crime before news of the murder is leaked and Chinatown explodes.

The Woman in the Camphor Trunk: An Anna Blanc Mystery Details

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From Reader Review *The Woman in the Camphor Trunk: An Anna Blanc Mystery* for online ebook

Suspense Magazine says

Chinatown is the scene for this absolutely terrific book. It is the year 1908, in Los Angeles, when a body is discovered inside a trunk that resides in the apartment of the corpse's lover. This scares the police more than anything else, seeing as that this Caucasian missionary female is the victim and her Chinese boyfriend is the only suspect. The L.A. police are more than frightened that a race war could begin.

It is Anna Blanc, Police Matron, and her former boyfriend, Detective Joe Singer, who discover the body that had been pushed into the trunk. They're aware that if this news gets out—that a white woman was killed in Chinatown—that bad times will come. So not only must they solve the crime, but they have to keep it a secret from a whole lot of nosey people. Mr. Jones, a prominent Chinese member of the community is having mixed feelings about helping the Los Angeles Police Dept. and is not keen on working with Anna.

As this is taking place, the Chinese Hop Sing tong has taken two slave girls from another group calling themselves the Bing Kong. Because of this event, a tong war is also about to break out that would just about kill everyone in Chinatown. And even though Joe orders Anna to get out of town for her own safety, Anna opts to stay and solve the crime.

So who dies and who lives? Can a race war, as well as an inner-city tong war be stopped? Readers will love the fact that Anna is absolutely fearless when it comes to her oath and her job, and well ahead of her time. They will also admire the love/hate relationship Anna has with her partner. It is safe to say that Jennifer Kincheloe is a wonderful storyteller with great tales to tell.

OLT says

I read and enjoyed *The Secret Life of Anna Blanc* when it first came out. It had a rather unusual premise, that of a rich debutante, unsatisfied with her life, becoming, against all odds, a police matron in early 1900s Los Angeles. That story was amusing, with all the adjustments Anna had to begin making to her formerly spoiled life, along the way solving a murder mystery and falling in love with handsome Detective Joe Singer, the police chief's son.

This new story gives us more of the same, although with a slightly different scenario for the murder which needs solving, this time in Chinatown, when a young white missionary woman's body is found stuffed into a trunk in a Chinatown apartment. Anna's former boyfriend Joe is now working the Chinatown beat and Anna, who's supposed to confine herself to working in the police station and jail there, manages to push her way into the action.

This had the makings of an interesting mystery, but it has too many flaws for me to be as enthusiastic about it as I was about the first Anna Blanc story. First problem for me was that the writing is choppy, the exposition is not very stylish and the sentence structures were not complex enough. A few participial phrases now and again are needed to break up the monotonous "subject-predicate" order of things. Second problem is that the characters are very superficially drawn. The heroine Anna, in particular, is not evolving and growing

much in her new life. She's still very impulsive and immature in behavior. I hope by the third book she's not still playing Lucy to Joe's Desi character.

The third issue I had with this is that the romance has no depth. Joe broke up with Anna (sometime between the end of the first book and the beginning of this one) because she refuses to agree to marry him. He then proceeds to court other women, looking for a wife. Why all this urgency to marry, and to marry just anyone? Since he seems to still be in love with Anna, wouldn't it make more sense to keep on courting her, trying to change her mind? Their to-and-fro about this issue began to annoy me.

Everything in this book received a superficial treatment. The mystery, the characters, the romance. And the writing was not good enough to make up for this. The time period and setting were researched well by the author, however. So that's a point in the book's favor. I liked the first book enough to still feel hopeful about this series. However, if I don't receive an ARC of the third book from Amazon's Vine program, I'll most likely get it from the library.

Michael Sauve says

This book was an absolute hoot! Set in the early 1900's, the author has created a real gem that is a superb mix of intrigue, mystery and a journey in problem-solving that is up with the best of them. The main character, Anna Blanc, is a feisty and determined gal that is a force to be reckoned with. Solving this who done it was never in doubt. As you read the book you picture yourself back in 1908. All that was missing was a shootout at the OK Corral! And if Anna Blanc was one of the shooters, just hope you're not on the opposing end of the duel. This gal means business. A thoroughly enjoyable read Ms. Kincheloe. Job well done. Can't wait to see what Anna Blanc is up to next!

James Ziskin says

Anna Blanc is a one-in-a-million character. Combination of innocence, spunk, beauty, and intelligence. She's adorable and maddeningly unmanageable at the same time. Set in LA's Chinatown in 1908, *THE WOMAN IN THE CAMPHOR TRUNK* is a brilliant, funny, addictive read. Highest recommendation.

Heather C says

Oh dear Anna Blanc, how you get yourself into even bigger scrapes in this book than you did before! One might have thought you would have learned something...but it is just as hilarious, so keep bringing it. That is one thing that I have to mention – while this book is a historical mystery and sometimes thriller, there is so much comedy in the writing and dialogue that it keeps me listening hour after hour!

Book 2 picks up just a short time after the culminating events of the previous installment – Anna is figuring out even more how to navigate the working class world on her own, without her father's money. But what she lacks in know-how she makes up for in spirit! As she gets herself wrapped up in a case of kidnapped Chinese women and a simmering war in Chinatown, she continuously bests the “real” cops as solving the crime. She knows a little more about the seedy world than she did before, but Chinatown is WAY out of her

experience zone, so she is constantly playing catch-up. Through this storyline the author explores many Chinese customs as well as the barriers and stereotypes that the Chinese faced at this time.

I still loved Joe Singer and Anna's relationship – that push-pull is there no matter how much they fight it, avoid it, and move on, but they are still SO hung up on each other that their working together is HILARIOUS. I loved the scene where Joe is in jail and Anna is intent on taking on solving this crime herself – he is having NONE of it! They are from such different worlds and really want different things in life, but something keeps pulling them back together and some of their best scenes are when they are looking out for each other.

The plot was pretty tight and covered A LOT of ground. There were a couple spots in the middle where I felt we didn't need to be off on this tangent (while still relevant), but the banter and relationship growth moved me quickly through it enough that I don't feel that it much affected my enjoyment of the novel. I would pick up another installment in a heartbeat! There is still so much unresolved!

Audiobook Discussion:

Much like the first book, this was one of THE best audio productions I have listened to. It is excellently narrated. Moira Quirk is someone that would now lead me to pick up a book I'm not even interested in because she could interest me in it through her performance (believe me, I have already went and shelved a few of her other works in my Audible wishlist that are paranormal in genre, which isn't my typical thing). And a performance it truly is. Quirk doesn't just read the novel, but imbues Kincheloe's characters with even more life. As I stated above, Kincheloe wrote some amazing characters that I loved, but Quirk brings out their complete nature to where you feel like they are standing in the room next to you. Yes, each character has their own unique voice, but many narrators do that. However, Quirk not only brings a different voice, but you can envision their mannerisms as well just from the way they are speaking. I'm not sure how she does this, but whatever it is, keep doing it! There is quite the range of nationalities and type of personalities in this novel and Quirk makes them all feel truly real, not cookie cutter or stereotyped. And there is singing! Actual singing! That is one of the things that always disappoints me is when a part that is clearly intended to be sung is instead simply read. And while I know that there are often legitimate reasons this has to be done, it does take away from the experience of the book and colors my perception of it.

Loved the book, loved the production, loved the narrator! Go pick up this book in print (if you don't listen to books), but I HIGHLY encourage you to check out this audiobook production, it is FANTASTIC and you will not regret it!

This review was also posted at The Maiden's Court blog and a copy was received and honestly reviewed.

Laurie • The Baking Bookworm says

3.5 STARS - Disclaimer: This ARC was generously provided by the author's publicist in exchange for my honest review.

Ever since I read the first Anna Blanc book two years ago I've been itching to read the next book in this historical mystery series. Anna set herself apart from other main characters - she was sassy and ahead of her time in terms of women's right to choose what they want to do with their lives. This series is a mystery, with sides of humour and romance, set in 1908 Los Angeles. But 1908 wasn't a good era to be Anna Blanc, an impulsive debutante who wasn't satisfied to follow the expected plan for a woman of her standing. She didn't

want to be a man's wife if it meant that she couldn't follow her dream of being a police matron.

The Woman in the Camphor Trunk is the second book in the Anna Blanc historical mystery series and it opens with an amazing, attention-grabbing first line:

**"Anna Blanc was the most beautiful woman ever to barrel down
Long Beach Strand with the severed head of a Chinese man."**

This time around, the humour is downplayed slightly but readers will still see Anna's spunky personality as she and Detective Joe Singer try to figure out their relationship and solve the murder of a young woman found in a trunk in Los Angeles' Chinatown.

Within the story, Kincheloe addresses the racial tensions and outright discrimination against the Chinese population and continues to show the restrictions set upon women of the time. Her descriptions were eye-opening, and I appreciated the research involved to bring this era and setting to life.

While I enjoyed this book, I didn't enjoy it quite as much as the first book. The romance element lacked tension and the mystery, while detailed and twisty, wasn't as intriguing as I had expected (especially their romp in the wilderness).

Overall, this was a solid follow-up to one of my favourite debut mystery series. It is well researched with a unique setting and main character. Anna's signature sass and compunction to get into trouble are in the forefront and I look forward to seeing what new scrapes she can get herself into.

Note: I highly recommend starting this series with The Secret Life of Anna Blanc.

Kathy says

To say that Anna Blanc is a woman ahead of her time in 1908 is the definition of understatement. Her bravery and commitment in being an independent woman is undeniable. Forsaking a life of leisure and riches as the daughter of a wealthy banker to pursue a career in police work defies her contemporaries' understanding and resulted in her father disowning her. Introduced to Anna in The Secret Life of Anna Blanc, readers will be delighted to learn that she hasn't changed her unconventional ways of pursuing criminals in this second book. While exasperating to her ex-boyfriend, Detective Joe Singer, Anna is as focused and dedicated an investigator as there is, even though that's not supposed to be her job. Police matrons, as the scarce number of women employees in the department were called at that time, were limited to dealing with women prisoners and children. Of course, Anna is the exception to almost any rule of the day. Beautiful, smart, and resourceful make Anna a force to be reckoned with, but her compassion for victims is her stimulus for pursuing a case.

The Woman in the Camphor Trunk takes us into the Chinatown area of Los Angeles, a part of the city that is dangerous and perplexing to those who aren't of that ethnic affiliation. The LA policemen assigned to the China Squad, including Joe Singer, walk a fine line between keeping the peace and working within the framework of Chinese culture. It's no place for a woman, but women are a large part of this story, and being

a woman hasn't yet deterred Anna. A white missionary woman is found dead in a trunk in the living quarters of a Chinese man, and the Chinese landlord's wife won't talk to the policemen, key word being men. So, with more than a little reluctance, Anna is sent with Detective Joe Silver to interview the Chinese woman. Anna's toe is in, and after viewing the remains of the missionary in the trunk, she is intent on inserting her whole being into the investigation. An investigation that must be kept secret, as the repercussions to Chinatown and its residents would be bloody and relentless if knowledge that a white woman was discovered dead in a Chinese man's room, and that the Chinese man was her lover. With the lover missing, solving the murder looks to be a long shot, but long shots are Anna's favorite causes. She and Joe must navigate the warring factions of the two major tongs, or gangs, as well as a community whose distrust of white people is well ingrained. But, an unexpected development makes the case personal to Anna, and nothing will deter her from pursuing a resolution, not even Joe's dating other women to find a wife. Anna does, however, begin to have some second thoughts about turning down Joe's proposal to her.

Jennifer Kincheloe does so many things well and right in this book. When the beginning sentence to the book is "Anna Blanc was the most beautiful woman ever to barrel down Long Beach Strand with the severed head of a Chinese man," the reader knows it's going to be a remarkable story. The historical detail, from Anna's clothes to police procedure to cultural prejudices, is well researched and flows seamlessly into the story. The humor that Kincheloe infuses into the life of Anna is a major point of enjoyment, starting with Anna's living arrangements. Surrounded by her riches of belongings she brought with her when kicked out by her father, she is crammed into a low rent room, continually behind in her rent. The plots are clever and layered, with unexpected connections to the past.

I thank the publishers for providing an advanced reader's copy for this book in a series that I find so much enjoyment in. Jennifer Kincheloe has proved herself an author to follow.

Mary (Biblophile) says

I didn't care for this second Anna Blanc book as much as the first one in the series. Anna's character hasn't grown much as she's still silly and superficial. The romance with Joe felt flat and immature on both their parts. The story itself, while interesting and seemingly well researched, seemed uneven and over-the-top at times. Overall, I found this one a bit of a disappointment and hope the next book will rectify some of the current flaws.

Aleen ~Lampshade Reader says

Originally posted on lampshadereader.com

I voluntarily reviewed an Advance Reader Copy (received via the publisher) of this book.

Anna Blanc is back in *The Woman in the Camphor Trunk*. The police matron with the most still delights with her antics and stubbornness.

I read book 1 and 2 consecutively, but writing this review makes me miss Anna already and I can't wait for more in the series. In this installment Anna finds her self solving a murder in Chinatown. Amidst a gang war that is going on, Anna defies all again in order to bring justice to the victim.

Her relationship with Joe is still a little loopy. Yes, they are still on again off again and it's always something. Normally, I would find that annoying, but for some reason it just works.

She's a character who knows what she wants and is not afraid to go after it. And she's not letting a man stop her from fulfilling her goals.

“She would give up anything, except her independence, to have him, because, for the first time, Anna was the mistress of her own destiny. She could go where she pleased, do what she pleased, and she paid a terrible price for it.”

Joe on the other hand, is a little bit more free with his emotions this time. I liked that revelation.

“You make me crazy, Sherlock, but I don't know what I'd do if anything ever happened to you. I need you in the world. Do you understand?”

For once what he says makes me swoon. I love their little arguments.

Again, there are some really great characters that interact with Anna. But nothing compares to Madame Lulu from book 1. She should totally become a regular.

There's a little Easter Egg that I noticed from each book and that they both end with the same sentence. I won't give it away, but it was a pretty cool find. Wonder if that continues throughout the whole series.

I would recommend reading The Secret Life of Anna Blanc (book 1) first.

Laurie says

The opening scene of this novel has the protagonist running down the beach, with a rotting head in a bucket, trying to escape a policeman. Hampered by long, tight, skirts and fancy shoes, she almost doesn't make it, but in the end she escapes.

Set in 1908 Los Angeles, Anna Blanc, society girl, has (in the last novel, which I did not read) turned crime solver and spurned her arranged engagement. This has caused her father to disown her and cast her out without a penny. She is living in a rundown apartment, surrounded by fancy furniture and fine dresses and hats, shoes unfit for walking the disgusting streets of LA, and a few pieces of jewelry that she had loaned out the day her father kicked her out. She lives on a diet of Cracker Jacks and tinned kippers, having, at the beginning, no income and a lot of back rent to pay.

She has now been hired as assistant matron at the LA precinct house and jail; her job is to chase down runaways, deal with ladies of the night, interview women who feel uneasy talking to male police, and basically not do anything exciting. But when she gets taken along on an interview in Chinatown, the case gets interesting. The body of a white woman is found in a trunk- in the room of a Chinese man. Given the

rampant racism of the time, this could ignite riots. The investigation must take place quickly and quietly. Add to this an incipient tong war over kidnapped child prostitutes, and a personal angle with the slain white woman, and we have a complex narrative. Of course there is a romantic thread, too, one that started in the previous book, with a detective who wants to marry and have a family. Anna refuses to swear obedience to anyone, and does not want to have children. And then there is that rotting head...

I loved the writing. Kincheloe brought old Los Angeles to life for me, including the non-tourist part of Chinatown where much of the story takes place. The author puts details about things like dress, enough to show the era, but not *too* much detail. I liked Anna, although she is a little bit too full of her ability to take care of herself. Like it or not, a woman in heavy skirts and a corset, untrained in weapons or self-defense, cannot wander into just any situation and expect to fight her way out! The other characters are good, and I hope they get fleshed out more as the series continues. The killer was one I didn't expect, but the killer had reasons that made sense for the time and place. Five stars.

Magdalena aka A Bookaholic Swede says

I read *The Secret Life of Anna Blanc* in the beginning of this year and I loved the book. It's one of those historical mystery books that really had it all, interesting mystery, humor and a romantic side story that worked. The big question was, would the sequel, *The Woman in the Camphor Trunk*, be as good? I'm glad to say that this book also was a great read, although I found that I was more captivated by the story in the first book. But, that doesn't mean that this one is in any way bad. It just that the first book had so much hilarious moment with Anna trying to work as a police matron and keep this as a secret from her father. Now in this book is the cat out of the bag and she's thrown out and living on crumbs.

Still, how can you not love a book that starts off with Anna sprinting from a police officer with a stolen Chinese head? Then, we have the small problem with Anna having to work with Detective Joe Singer who loves her, but whom Anna determent to not marry since she wants to be a free woman. Which has meant that Joe is starting to look to find love with another woman to Anna's consternation. Then, we have the white women stuffed in a trunk in Chinatown that has to be kept a secret so that it won't turn out into a riot since the finding of a dead white woman in Chinatown could have serious repercussions. So, now Joe and Anna have to try to find who killed the woman and why as well as keeping everything hush hush. Anna also has to fight to keep her jealousy in check every time she sees Joe with a woman that she suspects he's courting.

The Woman in the Camphor Trunk is a worthy sequel to *The Secret Life of Anna Blanc*. If you haven't read the first book do I really urge you to do so, especially if you love historical mystery books. And, of course, I also recommend this book. And, I'm looking forward to reading book three!

I want to thank the publisher for providing me with a free copy through Edelweiss for an honest review!

Jessica says

Thanks to Prometheus Books for the advanced copy in exchange for my honest review.

I've always loved historical fiction and mysteries. So when they're combined I'll always be intrigued enough

to pick it up! **THE WOMAN IN THE CAMPHOR TRUNK** follows Anna Blanc in her investigation to hunt down a killer in Chinatown in the early 1900's.

The setting is Los Angeles in 1908, specifically in the dangerous area of Chinatown. Police Matron, Anna Blanc, and Detective Joe Singer discover a body. The white missionary woman was found stuffed into a trunk that was found in her Chinese lover's apartment. He has disappeared, and Blanc and Singer fear that if word gets out about a white woman being murdered in Chinatown that there will be a violent backlash against the Chinese population.

Throw in some rival gang problems within Chinatown that is adding fuel to the fire and you have the ingredients for a high tension murder investigation. Anna hits some road blocks in her investigations, mainly with Mr. Jones. Jones is a prominent Chinese leader that has issues not only with the LAPD, but also with Anna. Is she in danger? Can she and Singer solve the murder before the news gets out?

I will start out with saying that Anna Blanc is a fantastic character. She's spunky, innocent, independent, sometimes defiant, and keeps the reader engaged. She's smart and won't back down when it comes to the investigation. I definitely want to go back and read book one of the Anna Blanc series. Despite this being book two, this does read well as a standalone! I wouldn't necessarily call this historical fiction, but I love the setting of 1908 in Chinatown and Los Angeles.

Overall, if you want a good murder mystery with a spunky female lead, then you'll love Anna Blanc. I look forward to more in the Anna Blanc series!

I give this a solid 4/5 stars!

Lelia Taylor says

There's something about turn-of-the-century fiction that really appeals to me and I can't truly put my finger on just what it is. Maybe it's the knowledge that things are on the very edge of tremendous change and that life is going to become quite different as well as a good deal less innocent.

Anna is the epitome of these coming changes. Raised in a privileged society, she yearns for something that will engage her intelligence and her interest in people who aren't nearly so well off and she's willing to fight for her ambitions (although "ambition" isn't entirely the right word). Having found that she's good at detective work—she's curious and very smart, not to mention bold enough to go after what she considers justice—she goes where no woman has gone before, so to speak, throwing societal mores to the wind. Anna isn't allowed to be an actual detective but she gets a lot done as an assistant police matron.

This time, Anna is involved in investigating the murder of a white woman in Chinatown which, of course, exposes her to a world very different from anything she's known before with tongs, brothels, opium dens and the like. At first, she's assigned to work with Joe Singer but, due to some unfortunate circumstances, she soon has to develop her own leads, much to the dismay of every man she knows.

With a lot of humor from Anna, we get a good taste of how things were at that time and how a feisty young woman could get around some of the restrictions placed on women (and the painful consequences of defying society). The narrator, Moira Quirk, does a wonderful job of bringing Anna to life and, in fact, she makes me think of an older Flavia de Luce transported to America in an earlier day. The combination of Ms.

Kincheloe's well-researched and lively story and characters along with Ms. Quirk's talent make for a wonderful tale, the first I'll be adding to my list of favorite books read in 2018.

Larissa says

Once again, I am totally enamored with Anna Blanc's stories of crime fighting. Jennifer is such a talented writer and her style makes you feel like you're walking the streets of Los Angeles with Anna. I love that her stories include multiple mysteries that get resolved at different points throughout the story, all of which intertwine into one final, exciting climax. I also love that this book gave me a look at something I didn't know existed; the life that Chinese people lived in turn-of-the-century Los Angeles that was almost totally separate from the lives of white residents. Highly recommend!

Margaret says

I love Anna Blanc! Ever since I finished reading *The Secret Life of Anna Blanc* I have been keeping an eye for the sequel, because yes there had to be a sequel, the author couldn't leave us readers hanging - wondering what happened between her and Detective Joe Singer.

Who is Anna Blanc? She is a woman ahead of her time, she doesn't want to conform to her father's wishes and thus now struggles while living on her own. It isn't easy but she is determined. She is innocent yet spunky, has some of the strangest thought patterns and rationale I've ever seen. Her powers of reasoning are some that had me smiling and shaking my head at the same time. Witty, irresponsible and impulsive but at the same time caring and determined. She would rather be a detective than an Assistant Matron for the police department no matter how many feathers she ruffles.

So that's Anna Blanc in a nutshell! Now add her to Chinatown in 1908 where mystery, murder and mayhem run amuck and you've got a great story. Written with the same wit that I enjoyed in book 1, I recommend reading *The Secret Life of Anna Blanc* first, you'll get a better picture of who Anna is and what makes her tick.

The Woman in the Camphor Truck is based on real historical events, some of names, dates and locations have been modified to work together (author notes, yea!). There were twists and turns which kept me on my toes. All in all a very entertaining read. Definitely a series I recommend.

Thanks to Prometheus Books for an ARC and Jennifer Kincheloe (whom I had the privilege of meeting last month, but in no way affects this review).
