



The Woman in the Camphor Trunk

Jennifer Kincheloe

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Heroine Anna Blanc is a spirited woman who refuses to be a damsel in distress—unless it helps her to solve a case.

Jennifer Kincheloe's intrepidly stylish Anna Blanc returns in her latest adventure, *The Woman in the Camphor Trunk*. Anna, a young society woman who has opted for police work instead of a sheltered life of privilege, finds herself investigating a murder in 1908 Los Angeles's Chinatown, on "the edge of the white world where East met West."

Sleuthing heroine Anna is smart, resourceful, and wily, while also being somewhat emotional and impulsive. Her official job as an assistant matron for the Los Angeles Police Department is generally limited to tending to lost children or wayward girls, being deferential to the male detectives, and interviewing female crime victims or witnesses. These restrictions chafe at Anna like the unfashionably dysfunctional police-matron uniforms. She jumps at any chance to prove her investigative abilities.

The novel vividly portrays turn-of-the-century Chinatown, contrasting Tong War turmoil within the neighborhood confines with the racism and intolerance of the city beyond. Because a white woman has been found dead in her Chinese lover's apartment, the threat of anti-Asian backlash looms. Murder is bad enough, but miscegenation is considered by many Angelenos to be an even worse crime.

Anna, with her flaws, hunches, and wary bravery, carries the story, making her way through Chinatown's cultural maze—a place that her wealthy, controlling father never even allowed her to visit. Anna's independence has not come easily; she now lives marginally on a diet of Cracker Jacks and tinned kippers, pawning her former finery to get by. Her tempestuous relationship with fellow officer Joe Singer is also a significant part of the plot, adding a dimension of quirky romance to the underlying mystery.

Anna's desire for equal treatment on the police force and to not be dominated by men is historically absolute. A vibrant, sprawling adventure, *The Woman in The Camphor Trunk* offers a portrait of a spirited woman who refuses to be a damsel in distress—unless it helps her to solve a case.

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