



The Frangipani Tree Mystery

Ovidia Yu

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First in a delightfully charming crime series set in 1930s Singapore, introducing amateur sleuth SuLin, a local girl stepping in as governess for the Acting Governor of Singapore.

1936 in the Crown Colony of Singapore, and the British abdication crisis and rising Japanese threat seem very far away. When the Irish nanny looking after Acting Governor Palin's daughter dies suddenly - and in mysterious circumstances - mission school-educated local girl SuLin - an aspiring journalist trying to escape an arranged marriage - is invited to take her place.

But then another murder at the residence occurs and it seems very likely that a killer is stalking the corridors of Government House. It now takes all SuLin's traditional skills and intelligence to help British-born Chief Inspector Thomas LeFroy solve the murders - and escape with her own life.

The Frangipani Tree Mystery Details

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From Reader Review The Frangipani Tree Mystery for online ebook

Kate Olson says

A new favorite mystery series has officially entered my life! I love the (light) mystery genre, and Yu certainly takes it to a new level with the Crown Colony series. The Frangipani Tree Mystery is set in 1930s Singapore, with a young Chinese-Singaporean female protagonist. Su Lin's family is trying to marry her off, and to escape a marriage she ends up as the nanny for the Acting Governor of Singapore. Who is, of course, British. The child she is a nanny for is actually a 17-year-old but due to an intellectual disability, Dee Dee is described as functioning much like a child a decade younger. I feel that Yu has written this in a sensitive manner, while still maintaining the vernacular of the time and place and culture.

The mystery is originally one murder, but of course it develops and becomes more complex. From my perspective, the mystery is actually just a device for Yu to write about colonial Singapore, race, class and gender, and I'm HERE for it. As she states in a great article in the South China Morning Post, "I am not making fun of the issues. I take them seriously. But you don't have to be ugly to make a serious point. It's not sugar-coating, it's lubricating the idea so you can slide it in and say what you want". This article, which labels Yu as a "gay feminist writer" is a wonderful companion piece to the readers new to the author's work. Here is the article I reference: Ovidia Yu, gay feminist author from Singapore, takes a cosy-but-candid approach to addressing the Lion City's ills

This is EXACTLY what I'm looking for in my lighter reads - books that still address societal issues but in a way that blends with an entertaining story. You can have a mystery book that is simply that, a mystery, or you can blend it together with social commentary in such a smart way that readers learn and grow while also feeling enveloped in a comfy read.

After finishing this book, I instantly messaged my bookish friend Madeleine who loves historical British mysteries, but also cares about reading more diversely, and told her that I found her PERFECT book! I do hope she likes it, and I highly recommend it to anyone who loves historical mysteries and is looking to learn more about colonial Singapore. Because if you aren't familiar, it's a time and place and circumstance that everyone should know about. I have already ordered book two in the series and can't wait to read it! I have also ordered book 1 in her Auntie Lee series.

Shane says

I actually quite enjoyed this, the first in a new series of mystery books by the Singaporean author Ovidia Yu. It's set in 1930's Singapore and English colonialism plays a heavy part of the story. The characters were interesting and with real personality. I didn't see the ending panning out the way it did, so that was pleasing. Overall, I thought it was an interesting and engaging murder mystery.

Cynthia A. Morgan says

Excellent mystery set in 1930s Singapore. I actually lived there for 7 years in the 1990s, so I appreciated

customs, food, street names, & places.

Chen Su Lin, the protagonist, is a delightful, intelligent, & resourceful young woman, ambitious & wanting more from life than an arranged marriage. Be careful what you wish for!

I look forward to reading the next book in the series.

Jacky says

This was an enjoyable enough read that I went on to borrow #2 in the series, The Betel Nut Tree Mystery, when I was at the second last chapter (not embarked on TBNTM yet). Experienced a slight déjà vu moment when the murderer was revealed, like I've read a similar plot before. As whodunits go, hope book#2 will be more thrilling and wicked.

Kinda cute that both books in these series revolves around trees; wonder if a third "tree book" is in the making.

Ccdemaio says

I loved reading this book set in 1930s Singapore. The characters took a while to warm up to but I ended up liking Le Froy and Su Lin, the two main characters. I bought both this book and the second in the series at the same time while back in Singapore and will read the second. Love the pieces I recognize of the city and the people. Not sure how this book would read to someone not familiar with the city...

Aidan says

"I felt that this was a very strong start to what seems to be a promising series of mysteries."

For a full review check out my blog [Mysteries Ahoy!](#)

Cathy Cole says

I was in the mood for a historical mystery set in an exotic locale, and Ovidia Yu's first Crown Colony mystery set in 1936 Singapore fit the bill nicely. The setting of The Frangipani Tree Mystery is worth the price of admission alone, but there is so much more to the book than its time period and location that I'm really looking forward to reading further in the series.

Even though I found the identity of the killer to be much too easily deduced, I fell in love with the character- - and the voice-- of young Chen Su Lin. Since she has a withered leg, orphaned Su Lin's prospects are grim according to her uncle who insists on parading one bribed and unattractive suitor after another past her. Luckily Su Lin's grandmother has insisted that Su Lin be educated, and it's this education as well as the influence of the mission school's head teacher that has made the young woman yearn for the freedom to do as she chooses. As Su Lin spoke, I kept hearing very faint traces of Laurie R. King's wonderful character,

Mary Russell.

And if there's a Mary Russell, there should be a Sherlock Holmes, right? There is, in the newly-appointed Chief Inspector Thomas LeFroy. LeFroy is determined to use his wits and British know-how to ferret out any corruption in the police force and to put an end to crime in Singapore's streets. British he may be, but he's not the snobbish sort of Englishman. He speaks the language, appreciates the culture, and knows the traditions of the city in which he lives. And it doesn't take him long to realize that Su Lin is one very valuable young woman indeed. Originally hired to work as LeFroy's housekeeper, the inspector can readily see how important she can be to him as an informant in the acting governor's household.

With characters and a setting such as these, it's no wonder I'm looking forward to the next book in the series!

Susan says

In 1930s Singapore, Su Lin has few options other than to accept the groom her family chooses for her. Instead she accepts a job as a housekeeper for Chief Inspector Thomas LeFroy. But along the way she volunteers to look after the governor's developmentally challenged daughter after the woman's nanny is found dead under the frangipani tree. The setting is fascinating and well-researched. Su Lin is definitely a character worth reading about and it is going to be interesting to see how her partnership with LeFroy develops. About 85% of a terrific book, but then the plot requires Su Lin to become suddenly stupid. Still, good enough that I will definitely be looking for the next in the series.

Jillian says

I really enjoyed this one. While I liked much about the Aunty Lee series, it didn't grab me and have me wanting more. The Frangipani Tree Mystery, set in Singapore between the two World Wars, certainly did.

The narrative flows, maintaining pace. It shifts easily between first and third person. The characters are rounded and sympathetically drawn even when hugely flawed. The reader empathises with SuLin and learns to see the colony through her eyes. It is a nuanced view of Singapore and of colonial life.

I have that excitement and joy of being at the beginning of a series with characters I like and a setting that promises many more hours of reading pleasure. There is none of the reserve I have about the Aunty Lee series.

How long, I wonder, before a second in the series?

Helen Kl says

I thoroughly enjoyed this book and immediately ordered the next one. Brings back happy memories of life in a much changed Singapore. Interesting and readable to the end with a few tense moments thrown in for good measure.

Ely says

A wonderful taste of colonial Singapore

A wonderful depiction of colonial Singapore with all the different stratas of society, each not mixing openly, but knowing what everyone else is doing.

Matt Tarasuk says

Wonderful Singaporean mystery, set in British colonial rule days. Loved the new main character, Su Lin, and her investigator mentor, Le Froy.

A great plot, with lots of twists and an interesting mixing of the local cultures and their clash with the ruling Brits.

A fun, fast read, and not one to disappoint!

Cindy says

I had read an article about mysteries set in other locales and thought I would experiment with some of those that made it into series. This is the first in the series set in Singapore in 1936 with political and cultural issues swirling. SuLin is a young Chinese native who has been sent to the local mission school to learn English. She is also considered 'bad luck because her parents died and she contracted polio'...but her grandmother is something of a 'mysterious grande dame in the community' and recognizes her book and street smarts. SuLin is about to be sent to work for the British born Chief Inspector Thomas LeFroy when a questionable death occurs.

I will definitely check out the next in the series.

Jaclyn says

Fun and quick mystery. SuLin is a likeable series character, reminds me a bit of Flavia de Luce by Alan Bradley's mysteries. Even though SuLin is older (16 y/o) and not as macabre / nerdy over science, she has a similar irrepressible curiosity, and even though at 16 she's already pretty much an adult and looking at career prospects (the story is set in 1936), she seems young. I also like the Chief Inspector Thomas LeFroy who seems like a nice man and mentor figure.

Doreen says

So, full disclaimer, Ovidia Yu sent me this herself as we've developed a quite friendly professional relationship. I super love her Aunty Lee mystery series, feeling it's gone from strength to strength as the

series progresses, so I was quite thrilled to receive the first in Ms Yu's new series. The setting is terrific -- I am always partial to books that do justice to the region I come from, and Ms Yu writes about Singapore with both skill and love -- and Su Lin is a wonderful heroine. The mystery is also well done: I suspected but wasn't sure of the identity of the murderer till the very end.

But, I don't know why the writing bothered me so much. I know Ms Yu is an excellent writer (please, everyone, read *Meddling And Murder*, which is one of the best books to come out of Singapore ever) so I don't know how to explain how weirdly underwritten *The Frangipani Tree Mystery* felt in parts. It didn't flow well at all, and while I liked Su Lin, I didn't feel immersed in her experiences at any point in the book. Given how immediately sympathetic I found her, this was a very strange position to find myself in. There are parts of the book that are very good, usually having to do with Su Lin's family or her interactions with other locals, but most of the scenes with white people felt stilted and unnatural (also, poorly edited. Most glaringly, how did Dee-dee know Su Lin's name at the beginning?) Which reminds me of the (few) weaknesses of Ms Yu's debut mystery, *Aunty Lee's Delights*, and leads me to wonder whether TFTM reads so oddly because the white people are inescapable in it, and perhaps Ms Yu is uncomfortable in her fictionalization of them (tho again that wasn't so much a problem in *Aunty Lee's Chilled Revenge*, so I don't even know.)

Anyway, I'm very eager to see where we go next with this series because so much about it is promising, and I know Ms Yu can deliver. If you just want to immerse yourself in a historical mystery tho, in a time and place that isn't often (if ever?) covered by the genre, this isn't a bad book for it. I just know Ms Yu can write better than this quite entertaining, if somewhat stilted, novel.
