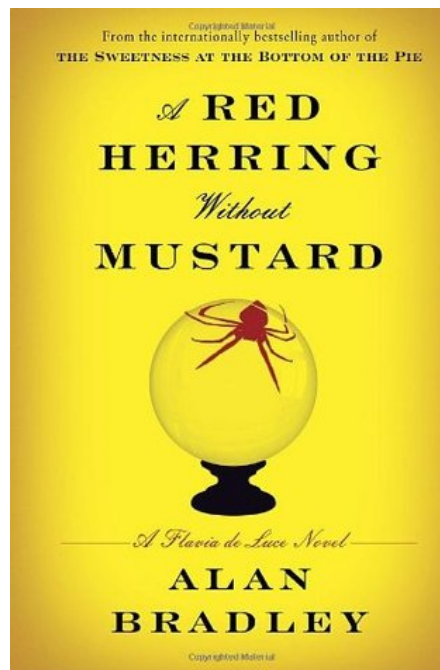




A Red Herring Without Mustard

Alan Bradley

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A Red Herring Without Mustard Alan Bradley

Award-winning author Alan Bradley returns with another beguiling novel starring the insidiously clever and unflappable eleven-year-old sleuth Flavia de Luce. The precocious chemist with a passion for poisons uncovers a fresh slew of misdeeds in the hamlet of Bishop's Lacey--mysteries involving a missing tot, a fortune-teller, and a corpse in Flavia's own backyard.

Flavia had asked the old Gypsy woman to tell her fortune, but never expected to stumble across the poor soul, bludgeoned in the wee hours in her own caravan. Was this an act of retribution by those convinced that the soothsayer had abducted a local child years ago? Certainly Flavia understands the bliss of settling scores; revenge is a delightful pastime when one has two odious older sisters. But how could this crime be connected to the missing baby? Had it something to do with the weird sect who met at the river to practice their secret rites? While still pondering the possibilities, Flavia stumbles upon another corpse--that of a notorious layabout who had been caught prowling about the de Luce's drawing room.

Pedaling Gladys, her faithful bicycle, across the countryside in search of clues to both crimes, Flavia uncovers some odd new twists. Most intriguing is her introduction to an elegant artist with a very special object in her possession--a portrait that sheds light on the biggest mystery of all: Who is Flavia?

As the red herrings pile up, Flavia must sort through clues fishy and foul to untangle dark deeds and dangerous secrets.

A Red Herring Without Mustard Details

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Author : Alan Bradley

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From Reader Review A Red Herring Without Mustard for online ebook

Lisa Vegan says

This was a wonderful book choice to transition me from 2011 to 2012.

Flavia is so much fun! She's a hoot. But, with each book, I also find her more & more endearing. And she really makes me appreciate chemistry.

For the first time I'm enjoying Gladys as her own character, not just as an accoutrement of Flavia's.

I would have preferred Roma to Gypsy, though this is historical fiction and I'm sure the term is more correctly used for this time and place. But then right away the word for horse was given in the Romany language so I was satisfied.

So, I read this almost immediately after reading book 2 and my thought was I'd go on almost immediately to book 4, but it turns out that for all the griping I do about waiting for each next book in a series to be available, I think there is something to be said for enjoying series books more if there is some time in-between them. I think I'll wait at least several months to continue with this series; I have too many books at the top of my queue to do anything else anyway.

I love how Flavia says: "...because I was only eleven years old, I was wrapped in the best cloak of invisibility in the world."

This series is one of my favorite cozy mystery series.

I love how the scary parts are short and not too scary. In this book, I nearly cried with emotion at the last line and nearly laughed when I turned the page to read the short author's note.

And, I didn't guess the mystery in full, not at all, and I enjoy having good clues yet being kept basically in the dark. I read so many mysteries I often do guess them, which can be fun but I prefer being surprised.

4 ½ stars

I just upped the other books in this series from 4 to 5 stars. Its protagonist is just too unique for me to feel otherwise.

Sandi says

I absolutely adore Flavia de Luce, a precocious 11 year old who tries to solve the murders that seem to be occurring quite frequently in the town of Bishop's Lacy. (I listen to audio, so forgive me if I spell things wrong.) Quite frankly, the little village has so many murders, I would think one would be safer living in South Los Angeles.

Reading A Red Herring Without Mustard, I realized what makes the character of Flavia so appealing. She is extremely intelligent, perhaps too much for her own good. However, she's pretty naive about a lot of things as well. She doesn't realize that her sisters do love her even though they constantly torment her. She doesn't

realize the implications of her father's financial situation. She doesn't see herself the way others see her and it shocks her when people tell her things about herself that she can't imagine being true.

I am starting to wonder a few things about Flavia and her family. First, does Flavia ever go to school? What about her sisters? I think all three books have taken place during one summer, but Flavia never mentions the last school year or the upcoming one. We learn in this book that Flavia doesn't have any friends. Why? Is it because she doesn't go to school?

I also wonder why her mother went mountain climbing in the Himalayas when Flavia was a baby. It seems quite odd. Is it possible that the mountain climbing story is a cover up for something else that happened to Harriet? Could it be that she's not really dead?

I also have to wonder why the Colonel's name is de Luce as well as the girls when it's pointed out that the house and money belonged to Harriet. She was the de Luce, not the Colonel. Did he take her name when they married? And, wouldn't he and/or the girls have inherited the house and money when Harriet died? It seems as if they didn't. does that mean that Harriet just disappeared?

The fact that I'm wondering these things and hoping that my questions get answered in future volumes just goes to show how involved I've become with Flavia's story. However, I do hope that she's twelve years old by the next time we see her. I hope she's in school too.

As usual, Jane Entwistle did a terrific job of narrating. She captures Flavia's energy and enthusiasm perfectly. In this installment, she also does a great job of voicing Flavia's naivety too.

Crowinator says

As always, a delight.

One-sentence summary: Flavia de Luce returns in her third mystery, investigating a long-ago missing child, the brutal attack on a gypsy fortune-teller, and a murdered local thug.

I feel like I've already said everything I need to about this series in my short reviews of the other two books. This one isn't any different -- it's delightful, charming, and funny, but it has dark undertones (her sisters' treatment of Flavia, which seems to be worse in this book; her father's absent-minded neglect; the family's looming money troubles; and oh yeah, all the murders). Obviously, Flavia carries the series, and you either love it or hate it on the basis of her character, because you can't escape her point of view: she is terribly deceitful and cunning and prideful, too smart to see how foolish she is, but she has a vulnerable and even a naive side that helps you remember that she's only a child, and a lonely one at that.

My favorite part of this series so far is seeing how the relationship between Flavia and Inspector Hewitt develops: both his wry but protective treatment of her and her fantasies of earning his esteem as a detective. Flavia's near-obsession with him and with his pretty wife are funny but heartbreaking. At one point, she daydreams about being invited to tea, I think, where they both shower her with attention, and to me it shows how much she longs for a fully-engaged, demonstrative family. (Also it shows her delusions of grandeur, which is the dark side to Flavia's flights of fancy; she is entirely too in love with her genius to admit to any faults of her own.) I love that he actually invites her to visit at the end! She needs someone wholly on her side and willing to do what it takes to mold her into the best detective she can be -- because otherwise, she may turn into a criminal mastermind one day.

Judy says

Full Disclosure--I'm in love with Flavia de Luce, the 11 year old who is deeply devoted to the study of chemistry, with a special interest in poisons, and an amateur sleuth. Flavia spends her time humoring her widowed father, who spends most of his time engrossed in stamp collecting, and bedeviling and avoiding her two older sisters--17 year old Ophelia whose passion is music and 13 year old Daphne whose passion is reading. In this third in the Flavia de Luce series, beginning with *The Sweetness at the Bottom of the Pie*, Flavia is up to her old adventures and in and out of trouble as only an 11 year old with almost total freedom and a trusty bicycle named Gladys can be. Set in the small English village of Bishop's Lacey after World War II, this book has everything--a baby that has been missing for years, an accused gypsy whose tent at the village fete burns, and a corpse found hanging on a statue in a fountain at Buckshaw, the de Luce estate. And, of course, Flavia finds herself squarely in the middle of the ensuing events. Not only are there red herrings, but there is someone who is running around the village with a pronounced fishy smell. Thank goodness for Kindle. I bought this book the day it was released and I'm eagerly awaiting the next adventure in the series. A word of advice--read these books, but read them in order. It pays to get to know Flavia and her family. Kudos, Mr. Bradley

Tiffany_Reads says

Loved the latest escapades of Flavia's life. This one is just as great as the previous two. It's chalked full of murder, mystery, mayhem and sister drama. Cant wait to read the next one.

Shayantani Das says

I absolutely love Flavia, this precocious yet not obnoxious child sleuth has won over my heart, and I absolutely love her. Which is why I totally love this book, because it shows us a little more about Flavia. Behind the lab glasses and witty remarks, lies the heart of a small kid, who misses his mother, and is hurt by her sister's hatred towards her. Some scenes were very very touching, and although really emotional scenes sometimes fail to move me, Flavia with her simple emotions almost made me cry.

The mystery part of the book was excellent, better than the first two books i think (although seriously, who cares). Flavia has her future predicted by a gypsy woman and later brought her home (after burning her caravan, hehe) only to have her attacked in the middle of the night. And thus Flavia had another juicy mystery in her hand, which she is determined to solve before the police does. Its, like Flavia say "jolly fun" . Her witty remarks, naïve yet very intelligent persona always kept me entertained and I almost obsessively added quotes from the book. I would have added the whole book to be honest, because I thoroughly enjoyed every line from it.

I wanted to prolong reading this book , to enjoy Flaiva's company for as long as I could, but the book got so interesting in the end that I couldn't stop. I don't know how I will survive till the next book comes out. I think I will reread the series again, because I honestly don't think I will ever grow tired of riding with Flavia on Gladys, through the fields of Bishop's Lacy or watching her as she adds hydrogen Sulphide in her sitter's chocolate, or puts poison ivy in her lipstick. What JOLLY FUN!

Highly Recommended. 5+++++++ stars, hehe.

I know I have added them already, but few of my favorite quotes:

"I remembered Father remarking once that if rudeness was not attributable to ignorance it could be taken as a sure sign that one was speaking to a member of the aristocracy."

"I had long ago discovered that when a word or formula refused to come to mind the best thing for it was to think of something else: tigers for instance or oatmeal. Then when the fugitive word was least expecting it I would suddenly turn the full blaze of my attention back onto it catching the culprit in the beam of my mental torch before it could sneak off again into the darkness."

An this..

"I had to make water " I said. It was the classic female excuse and no male in recorded history had ever questioned it. "I see " the Inspector said and left it at that. Later I would have a quick piddle behind the caravan for insurance purposes. No one would be any the wiser."

(Isn't she just awesome?)

Last one, and my new mantra

"Compared with my life Cinderella was a spoiled brat."

Richard Derus says

Review: 53 of seventy-five

Title: [A RED HERRING WITHOUT MUSTARD]

Authors: [[ALAN BRADLEY]]

Rating: 4.125* of five

The Book Report: Flavia de Luce of Buckshaw, Bishop's Lacey, is in it up to her neck again in this third outing of Alan Bradley's wildly popular series. This time she burns down a gypsy woman's fortune-telling tent, takes the woman home over her father's presumed objections, and then finds the lady bludgeoned almost to death in her caravan.

Next up is a meeting with the gypsy's semi-estranged granddaughter, deliciously yclept Porcelain, whose surprise presence in the crime-scene caravan causes Flavia to be assaulted and, subsequently, to invite the woman home with her. While escorting the younger gypsy into Buckshaw, her rambling, underheated Stately Home, Flavia spies a for-sure corpse dangling from Poseidon's trident. (That's one of Buckshaw's fountains, not the real Poseidon, of course.) It proves to be local ne'er-do-well and remittance man Brookie Harewood, last seen slouching about in Flavia's drawing room! Will the wonders never cease!

No, in fact, they won't, and Bradley spins a net for every red herring imaginable as Flavia encounters forgers, thieves, religious dissenters called Hobblers who baptize babies *a la grecque* One empathizes with Colonel de Luce, widower and soon-to-be bankrupt. He has a precocious daughter. Poor bastard.

My Review: Whatever else it is, this book is fun. It's just plain old-fashioned chuckle-inducing fun. It's a little ramshackle, what with the plot holes and all, and the behavioral improbability index starts high and

never comes down, but so what? Flavia's chemistry fetish caused me to smirk a bit in the first book, [The Sweetness at the Bottom of the Pie], and her all-around precocity wasn't helping stuff. I found the Colonel to be an absurd character, someone directly from the Wodehouse Warehouse. There just isn't enough vitriol to heap on Flavia's horrid sisters, Ophelia and Daphne (Feely and Daffy to Flavia).

But here's the thing: Each of these characters is reported in Flavia's first-person, eleven-year-old perspective. Keep that in mind, and there is a sudden SNAP as the lenses in the optometrist's big, black machine fall into place: "Better now, or now?"

And that's when you should read these books: Now.

Felicia says

I loved the first book in this series, and was not disappointed in the followup, although there seemed to be a lot more sadness in the life of the precocious 11 year old Flavia this time. She is still an intrepid detective, and her fights with her sisters have some of the funniest lines I've read in years, but the dysfunction in the family had a very lonely edge to it that made it hard to have as much FUN. The depth of it, however, was really fascinating.

The mystery in this installment was very fun/interesting as last time, and I just really enjoy this series, so if you're a mystery fan, check it out from the beginning!

Lata says

3.5 stars. While Flavia remains brilliant, funny, annoyed at being excluded from investigations when she keeps providing Inspector Hewitt his best clues, I had some trouble with the plot of this story. The Hobblers and stolen goods stuff kept eluding my interest, though it was important to the resolution of the story. And what the heck is with Feelie and Daffy? Why are they so mean to Flavia? Not having had sisters, I don't get their attitude towards Flavia.

Tatiana says

If you are contemplating reading A Red Herring Without Mustard you probably already adore Flavia de Luce, a precocious 12-year old amateur sleuth. If you feel wishy-washy about the girl, don't expect her to undergo a major personality transformation in this book, Flavia remains the same smart, naive, sneaky, lying chemist/detective as she was in The Sweetness at the Bottom of the Pie and The Weed that Strings the Hangman's Bag. And I wouldn't have her any other way.

As such series go, whenever a sleuth emerges, her/his residence immediately becomes a criminal hot zone. Same goes for such a tiny village as Bishop's Lacey. It's been only 2 months since the events of The Sweetness at the Bottom of the Pie, and here Flavia comes across a few more major crimes. First, after attending a local fete and accidentally setting a Gypsy fortune-teller's tent on fire, Flavia feels obligated to help out the said Gypsy woman and offers her to spend the night on her property. Too bad, she finds this woman beaten into pulp the next day and barely manages to save her life. And second, just hours later she

comes across the dead body of a local riffraff fellow in her own yard. Of course, Flavia can't leave these crimes to the police. She lies, she conceals evidence, she breaks into places and, naturally, she uncovers the truth!

It is Flavia who carries this entire series. I am not sure the mysteries themselves are all that complex, but what makes these books so darn entertaining is the narrator herself. She is funny, she is cheeky, she is simultaneously innocent and cunning, basically, she is one the most charismatic narrator I've ever come across. If you love Flavia de Luce, there is absolutely no way this book will disappoint you.

Julie Christine says

Perhaps I took too long to read *A Red Herring Without Mustard*. If I'd zipped through it on sunny Sunday afternoon, the rambling plot would have been a trifle to be indulged instead of endured. About two-thirds of the way in, brakes were put on the pace and the exposition became redundant.

There were heaps of elements that I did love, namely Flavia and her irascible, invincible spirit. Bradley loves this little girl and taking care to round out her precociousness with vulnerability. Flavia is taking on layers as a character as she begins to shed the innocence of childhood and enters the dark world of adolescence. She is becoming more self-aware and multi-dimensional. The settings of Buckshaw and Bishop's Lacey become more significant, offering greater delights and deeper tensions. The cloud hanging over Buckshaw grows as the family's fiduciary status weakens, and Flavia's sisters' teasing borders on torture.

But for all her precociousness and savvy sleuthing, Flavia's pigheaded blundering into crime scenes left me terrifically annoyed with Bradley. Flavia knows better than to traipse through blood, muck about with corpses, and smear her fingerprints all over murder weapons. Bradley does his heroine a great disservice in dumbing her down and creating comic book scenes of her escapades.

It is a challenge for the author to show more heart and soul in some of the secondary characters, because we see them only through Flavia's eyes. Her father, Dogger, Inspector Hewitt, and Porcelain- those characters whom Flavia regards with sympathy or holds in awe- are given the most flesh on their bones.

It's as if Bradley can't commit to writing a good mystery, relying instead on his irresistible heroine to carry the day and for that, the whole construct suffers. I've said this before, I'll say it again: I'm not a great reader of mysteries, so the whodunit aspect isn't a deal-breaker for me. But Good Golly, I still demand a good STORY. And if you are writing a mystery, well, silly is fine, but just don't let me yawn. *Herring* got off to an enchanting and intriguing start, and promised to be much better than ...*the Hangman's Bag*, but the too-brief foray into Gypsy culture, the inexplicable tangent of the Hobbler sect, and the plopping in and pulling out of Fenella and Porcelain (character, not china) were as disappointing as hydroponic tomatoes- a pretty package hiding flavorless pulp. The weak story was my central gripe about book #2 and if anything, #3 was a greater disappointment, if only because it started out with such promise. I remain convinced that Flavia is worthy of better, and greater, challenges.

Carolyn says

In this third book in this charming and entertaining series, Flavia invites a gypsy and her caravan to stay on the family estate (after accidentally burning down her tent at a fair), only to find the woman beaten nearly to

death the following morning. She later finds a dead body in the grounds of her house, a man who she earlier caught prowling inside the house up to something fishy and is determined to find out what he was up to.

It's always delightful to spend a few hours with Flavia deLuce. Youngest daughter of an old but impoverished aristocratic family struggling post WW2 to keep up the estate, 11 y old Flavia is left very much up to her own devices when not being terrorised by her older sisters. Her socialite mother disappeared while climbing mountains when Flavia was still a baby, her father has never recovered and copes by immersing himself in his stamp collection, not facing up to his estate falling down around him and with only a fleeting interest in what his daughters are up to.

Flavia is smart and curious and has inherited her great Uncle's chemistry lab where she likes nothing better than studying poisons. Recently she has become known for finding dead bodies and solving their murders through her sharp wits and her ability to sleuth throughout the countryside on her trusty bicycle while disarming people with her youth and polite questions to reveal secrets and clues to her. Always fun to visit the eccentric deLuce family and their staff, the interesting characters of the surrounding villages and the long suffering local police.

L.M. says

I'm telling you I love these books so much I'm afraid to share them. I would be sad to hear anyone say anything negative about my girl Flavia. These are the Agatha Christie books for the young at heart. I absolutely adore them, and each is even better than the last.

Emma says

3.5 stars. Flavia continues to be the gem in these books. A blend of vulnerable and feisty, dogged and determined. I admire her tenacity and resilience and her ability to create a rich and full life for herself.

Sandy says

I am not sure if it is the personality of Flavia or the voice given to her by the narrator of this audiobook that annoys me so much. At any rate, 10 hours and 45 minutes of this story was about 3 hours too long. I finally ended with a marathon listening session simply to avoid having to hear that voice again tomorrow! Not to mention, also, that there are too many (in my opinion) "educational" diversions and unnecessary, long-winded explanations. Stick to the story, please!

The many tentacles of the mystery were indeed enthralling. The story has great potential and I may consider circumventing the annoying audio interpretation by reading a print version of another book in this series. A good editor could make this into a terrific story but as it is -- well, as the saying goes -- meh!

Twig says

I've read this book in one sitting and oh my dear Flavia, you are the most adorable 11 year old girl I've ever known!!

Jeffrey Keeten says

"ALONE AT LAST!

Whenever I'm with other people, part of me shrinks a little. Only when I am alone can I fully enjoy my own company." Flavia de Luce

Flavia de Luce spends a lot of time by herself somewhat by choice and somewhat by her incompatibility with the rest of the household. She is the youngest of three daughters and is most decidedly lacking from any constructive supervision. Her father is a philatelist and spends most of his time intently examining stamps with a magnifying glass for those hairline faults that make them valuable and collectible. Her mother Harriet, the source of the family money, and the owner of the Buckshaw estate, had the audacity to disappear into the wilds of Nepal. She is presumed dead.

Money is tight because the family estate is tied up, with much uncertainty of ever being resolved, because of the premature demise of Harriet. So even though they live on this grand family estate it is slowly crumbling down around their ears. Wallpaper dangles from walls and ceilings. There are more drafts every year and the gardens have been turned back to nature.

Flavia spends most of her time trying to avoid her older sisters Ophelia (Feely) and Daphne (Daffy). Those aren't exactly endearing nicknames that Flavia has assigned them, but they have been well earned. Feely is concerned about clothes and improving her already beautiful complexion. Daffy is a voracious reader, and rarely takes her eyes from the pages unless it is to help Feely with their latest bit of fun torturing Flavia. The whole de Luce family is left to their own devices becoming more and more caricatures of themselves and less the well rounded individuals they would be if Harriet were still in the picture. Flavia whenever possible escapes to her laboratory. Her great-uncle Tarquin de Luce had installed a full working laboratory with bunsen burners, shelves of chemicals, and beakers which provides everything an eleven year old with an inquisitive mind needs to discover the mysteries of the universe.

Finding her hands covered with blood she muses about the components of this red substance.

"Red blood cells, I remembered from my chemical experiment, were really not much more than a happy soup of water, sodium, potassium, chloride, and phosphorus. Mix them together in the proper proportions, though, and they formed a viscous liquid jelly: a jelly with mystic capabilities, one that could contain in its scarlet complexities not just nobility but also treachery."

She makes the family cook cry. Like most eleven year old girls she is capable of moments of great cruelty, but forget that part, tears are so interesting.

"I had a special fascination with tears. Chemical analyses of my own and those of others had taught me that tears were a rich and wonderful broth, whose chief ingredients were water, potassium, proteins, manganese, various yeasty enzymes, fats, oils, and waxes, with a good dollop of sodium chloride thrown in, perhaps for taste. In sufficient quantities, they made for a powerful cleanser."

Flavia is only eleven, but in the course of this her third adventure she is going to find her third dead body.

(She is the Jessica Fletcher of Bishop's Lacey.) Crime fascinates her and dead bodies aren't really people, but fresh research specimens. It all begins with her going to see a gypsy to have her fortune told. In the process she manages to light the tent on fire. (These things tend to happen around Flavia.) In an act of self-preservation from the fire and from the impending punishment she flees the tent. The old gypsy woman does manage to escape the fiery inferno left in Flavia's wake and in an act of contrition Flavia invites her to move her caravan to the family estate. Later when she comes to check on the gypsy she finds her bloodied and battered and this time reacts with more courage and saves her life.

Who would want to hurt an old gypsy woman? The tale is older than Flavia.

Meanwhile a body shows up dangling from Poseidon's trident in the Buckshaw gardens with a de Luce silver shell fish fork stuck up one nostril. This is the very same young man that Flavia caught in the house the night before attempting to liberate an antique from the house. This sends Flavia on a flurry of investigations that somehow all have to be tied into a bow if she is ever going to find out the truth.

She is beset with red herrings.

"...a cup of ale without a wench, why, alas, 'tis like an egg without salt or a red herring without mustard." Thomas Lodge and Robert Greene *A Looking Glasse, for London and Englande* (1592)

She is attacked by a gigantic rooster during a bit of snooping and illegal entry. She is chased about by unscrupulous antique dealers. She meets Porcelain, a niece of the gypsy woman, and doesn't realize how lonely she is until she meets a person that is odd enough to be a real friend to her. Flavia, as always, is in trouble with the police. Her curiosity will not let anything lie despite orders to the contrary. She discovers hidden passages beneath Buckshaw that had been forgotten for generations. This takes her to icky places she has never been before.

"Even though I ducked the thing, its slimy finger still managed to caress my face, as if it were dying for want of human company."

And what is going on with the Wobblers? They are a sect of religious fanatics that believe their children must be dunked in running water by the heel in the same way as Achilles. Their membership is secret, but then secrets are what Flavia most likes to unlock.

So spend some time with a precocious young lady growing up in England shortly after WW2. She will make you feel proud to know her one moment quickly followed by the need to give her a good shake the next. She hatches elaborate plans of revenge against her foes (her sisters), but always manages to restrain herself from actually launching them. Sometimes planning the demise of our most ardent enemies is cathartic enough without actually destroying them. These aren't the type of books that I would typically read, but when each new volume comes out I become a buying zombie. I know how it is to feel lonely in a house full of people. I only wish I'd possessed Flavia's moxie. Oh and Flavia a word please..."*Spare us the pout. There's enough lip in the world without you adding to it.*"

Michael says

Review from Badelynge

This third outing of Alan Bradley's irrepressible Flavia De Luce gets the series back up to top form. Flavia saves the life of an old Gypsy fortune-teller who has been beaten and left for dead. Ok our young heroine had almost managed to burn her to a crisp the previous evening but the less said about such details the better.

Flavia sets out to track down the assailant, trampling over several crime scenes in the process, bamboozling the local constabulary and driving her family to new levels of embarrassment. Flavia can't resist the siren call of an unsolved serious misdemeanor, so when a body is found hung on an ornamental fountain in the grounds of Buckshaw Flavia is ecstatic. Never mind justice - think of the opportunities to prove her cleverness to that lovely man Inspector Hewitt. Perhaps he'll even invite her to tea.

The second book stepped over the line a few times with the added absurdities of the world of the puppet show. The fun, tongue in cheek adventures of Flavia combined with the exaggerated staginess of puppeteering didn't quite complement each other. This one is much more to my liking. We also get the introduction of a new character called Porcelain Lee who is a great inclusion, mainly because of her ability to bamboozle the bamboozler. She also gets a wonderful scene homaging perhaps Du Maurier's Rebecca, as she appears on the staircase dressed as Flavia's late mother Harriet. It's the ability to bring off that sort of a poignant vibe counterpointing the cheeky adventures of our precocious investigator that sets these books aside from a lot of its competitors. Bravo to Mr Bradley. And please sir, can we have some more.

Nikki says

I'm somewhat torn on the subject of Flavia de Luce. I find the books fun to read, but the hail-fellow-well-met Englishness (as portrayed by a Canadian writer who never went to England prior to starting on the first book). It's just a total fantasy, and I can never tell how seriously people are taking it.

As for the mystery in this particular installment, I figured it out relatively quickly, but it's still fun to follow along, and I love that the main character is a young girl who is fascinated with science. It all has rather a Famous Five feel, ultimately, with Flavia de Luce playing all five (well, maybe the four humans -- her bike, Gladys, or maybe her family's servant, Dogger, could be Timmy): how a kid solved the mysteries the police couldn't solve, with the police coming in at the end to wrap things up. I can even see Flavia's father as Uncle Quentin...

One thing that is bothering me is Flavia's relationship with her sisters. It's played lightly, yet it's frankly abusive. She's constantly being told that no one loves her, no one would want to spend time with her, that she's frankly unworthy of love... and I can't tell how seriously people (including Alan Bradley) are taking that.

There's more than a touch of Dahl's Matilda in Flavia, but it never seems to get any deeper than that. At this point, I'm starting to want to know why Flavia's sisters treat her that way, what effect this is really having on Flavia, whether this is just meant to build up a picture of a "quirky" family (ugh), or whether it's meant to be leading somewhere. Playing pranks is one thing, even fighting, but psychological warfare? It's really starting to get on my nerves.

Kevin says

Warning: I am going to gush.

I adore Flavia DeLuce!! Honestly this 11 year old precocious chemist is someone I wish were a friend or maybe I could be her brilliant uncle...maybe my favorite character in any fiction! In a word, delightful!

A couple of my favorite quotes...

"Anyone who knew the word slattern was worth cultivating as a friend."

"Tell them we may not be praying with them," Father told the Vicar, "but we are at least not actively praying against them."

"It is not unknown for fathers with a brace of daughters to reel off their names in order of birth when summoning the youngest, and I had long ago become accustomed to being called 'Ophelia Daphne Flavia, damn it.'"

"She consumed books like a whale eats krill."

"You never know what you're getting into when you stick your nose in other people's rubbish."

Start this fabulous series with the brilliant and Edgar Award winning, "The Sweetness at the Bottom of the Pie."

I just finished "A Red Herring Without Mustard" and thought it was a dazzling 5 star book. I was actually saddened when it was over. My highest of recommendations! This one is truly a great and fun read!
