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The Weed That Strings the Hangman's Bag: A Flavia de Luce Mystery Book 2



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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteur Pigtales, poisons and murder-most-foul A travelling puppet show arrives in the sleepy village of Bishop's Lacey - and a shocking murder takes place. For eleven-year-old Flavia de Luce, the crime will test her precocious powers of deduction to the limit - particularly when she discovers that the murder echoes a tragedy which occurred many years before...Praise for the historical Flavia de Luce mysteries: 'The Flavia de Luce novels are now a cult favourite' Mail on Sunday 'A cross between Dodie Smith's I Capture The Castle and the Addams family...delightfully entertaining' Guardian Fans of M. C. Beaton's Agatha

Raisin, Frances Brody and Alexander McCall Smith will enjoy the Flavia de Luce mysteries: 1. Sweetness at the Bottom of the Pie 2. The Weed That Strings the Hangman's Bag 3. A Red Herring Without Mustard 4. I Am Half Sick of Shadows 5. Speaking From Among the Bones 6. The Dead in Their Vaulted Arches 7. As Chimney Sweepers Come To Dust 8. Thrice the Brinded Cat Hath Mew'd 9. The Grave's a Fine and Private Place If you're looking for a cosy crime series to keep you hooked then look no further than the Flavia de Luce mysteries. * Each Flavia de Luce mystery can be read as a standalone or in series order *ExtraitOneI

was lying dead in the churchyard. an hour had crept by since the mourners had said their last sad farewells. At twelve o'clock, just at the time we should otherwise have been sitting down to lunch, there had been the departure from Buckshaw: my polished rosewood coffin brought out of the drawing room, carried slowly down the broad stone steps to the driveway, and slid with heartbreaking ease into the open door of the waiting hearse, crushing beneath it a little bouquet of wild flowers that had been laid tenderly inside by one of the grieving villagers. Then there had been the long drive down the avenue of chestnuts to the Mulford Gates, whose rampant griffins looked away as we passed, though whether in sadness or in apathy I would never know. Dogger, Father's devoted jack-of-all-trades, had paced in measured step alongside the slow hearse, his head bowed, his hand resting lightly on its roof, as if to shield my remains from something that only he could see. At the gates, one of the undertaker's mutes had finally coaxed him, by using hand signals, into a hired motor car. And so they had brought me to the village of Bishop's Lacey, passing sombrely through the same green lanes and dusty hedgerows I had bicycled every day when I was alive. At the heaped-up churchyard of St Tancred's, they had taken me gently from the hearse and borne me at a snail's pace up the path beneath the limes. Here, they had put me down for a moment in the new-mown grass. Then had come the service at the gaping grave, and there had been a note of genuine grief in the voice of the vicar, as he pronounced the traditional words. It was the first time I'd heard the Order for the Burial of the Dead from this vantage point. We had attended last year, with Father, the funeral of old Mr Dean, the village greengrocer. His grave, in fact, was just a few yards from where I was presently lying. It had already caved in, leaving not much more than a rectangular depression in the grass which was, more often than not, filled with stagnant rainwater. My oldest sister, Ophelia, said it collapsed because Mr Dean had been resurrected, and was no longer bodily present, while Daphne, my other sister, said it was because he had plummeted through into an older grave whose occupant had disintegrated. I thought of the soup of bones below: the soup of which I was about to become just another ingredient. Flavia Sabina de Luce, 1939-1950, they would cause to be carved on my gravestone, a modest and tasteful grey marble thing with no room for false sentiments. Pity. If I'd lived long enough, I'd have left written instructions calling for a touch of Wordsworth: A maid whom there were none to praise And very few to love. And if they'd balked at that, I'd have left this as my second choice: Truest hearts by deeds unkind To despair are most inclined. Only Feely, who had played and sung them at the piano, would recognise the lines from Thomas Campion's Third Book of Airs, and she would be too consumed by guilty grief to tell anyone. My thoughts were interrupted by the vicar's voice. "earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust, in sure and certain hope of the Resurrection to eternal life, through our Lord Jesus Christ; who shall change our vile body" And suddenly they had gone, leaving me there alone - alone to listen for the worms. This was it: the end of the road for poor Flavia. By now the family would already be back at Buckshaw, gathered round the long refectory table: Father seated in his usual stony silence, Daffy and Feely hugging one another with slack, tear-stained faces as Mrs Mullet, our cook, brought in a platter of baked meats. I remembered something that Daffy had once told me when she was devouring The Odyssey: that baked meats, in ancient Greece, were traditional funeral fare, and I had replied that in view of Mrs Mullet's cooking, not much had changed in two and a half thousand years. But now that I was dead, I thought, perhaps I ought to practise being somewhat more charitable. Dogger, of course, would be inconsolable. Dear Dogger: butler-cum-chauffeur-cum-valet-cum-gardener-cum-estate-manager: a poor shell-shocked soul whose capabilities ebbed and flowed like the Severn tides; Dogger, who had recently saved my life and forgotten it by the next morning. I should miss him terribly. And I should miss my chemistry laboratory. I thought of all the golden hours I'd spent there in that abandoned wing of Buckshaw, blissfully alone among the flasks, the retorts and the cheerily bubbling tubes and beakers. And to think that I'd never see them again. It was almost too much to bear. I listened to the rising wind as it whispered overhead in the branches of the yew trees. It was already growing cool here in the shadows of St Tancred's tower, and it would soon be dark. Poor Flavia! Poor stone-cold-dead Flavia. By now, Daffy and Feely would be wishing that they hadn't been so downright rotten to their little sister during her brief eleven years on this earth. At the thought, a tear started down my cheek. Would Harriet be waiting to welcome me to

Heaven? Harriet was my mother, who had died in a mountaineering accident a year after I was born. Would she recognise me after ten years? Would she still be dressed in the mountain-climbing suit she was wearing when she met her end, or would she have swapped it by now for a white robe? Well, whatever she was wearing, I knew it would be stylish. There was a sudden clatter of wings: a noise that echoed loudly from the stone wall of the church, amplified to an alarming volume by a half-acre of stained glass and the leaning gravestones that hemmed me in. I froze. Could it be an angel - or more likely, an archangel - coming down to return Flavia's precious soul to Paradise? If I opened my eyes the merest slit, I could see through my eyelashes, but only dimly. No such luck: it was one of the tattered jackdaws that were always hanging round St Tancred's. These vagabonds had been nesting in the tower since its thirteenth-century stonemasons had packed up their tools and departed. Now the idiotic bird had landed clumsily on top of a marble finger that pointed to Heaven, and was regarding me coolly, its head cocked to one side, with its bright, ridiculous boot-button eyes. Jackdaws never learn. No matter how many times I played this trick, they always, sooner or later, came flapping down from the tower to investigate. To the primeval mind of a jackdaw, any body horizontal in a churchyard could have only one meaning: food. As I had done a dozen times before, I leapt to my feet and flung the stone that was concealed in my curled fingers. I missed but then I nearly always did. With an "awk" of contempt, the thing sprang into the air and flapped off behind the church, towards the river. Now that I was on my feet, I realised I was hungry. Of course I was! I hadn't eaten since breakfast. For a moment I wondered vaguely if I might find a few leftover jam tarts or a bit of cake in the kitchen of the parish hall. The St Tancred's Ladies' Auxiliary had gathered the night before, and there was always the chance. As I waded through the knee-high grass, I heard a peculiar snuffling sound, and for a moment I thought the saucy jackdaw had come back to have the last word. I stopped and listened. Nothing. And then it came again. I find it sometimes a curse and sometimes a blessing that I have inherited Harriet's acute sense of hearing, since I am able, as I am fond of telling Feely, to hear things that would make your hair stand on end. One of the sounds to which I am particularly attuned is the sound of someone crying. It was coming from the north-west corner of the churchyard - from somewhere near the wooden shed in which the sexton kept his grave-digging tools. As I crept slowly forward on tiptoe, the sound grew louder: someone was having a good old-fashioned cry, of the knock-'em-down-drag-'em-out variety. It is a simple fact of nature that while most men can walk right past a weeping woman as if their eyes are blinkered and their ears stopped up with sand, no female can ever hear the sound of another in distress without rushing instantly to her aid. I peeped round a black marble column, and there she was, stretched out full length, face down on the slab of a limestone tomb, her red hair flowing out across the weathered inscription like rivulets of blood. Except for the cigarette wedged stylishly erect between her fingers, she might have been a painting by one of the Pre-Raphaelites, such as Burne-Jones. I almost hated to intrude. "Hullo," I said. "Are you all right?" It is another simple fact of nature that one always begins such conversations with an utterly stupid remark. I was sorry the instant I'd uttered it. "Oh! Of course I'm all right," she cried, leaping to her feet and wiping her eyes. "What do you mean by creeping up on me like that? Who are you, anyway?" With a toss of her head she flung back her hair and stuck out her chin. She had the high cheekbones and the dramatically triangular face of a silent cinema star, and I could see by the way she bared her teeth that she was terrified. "Flavia," I said. "My name is Flavia de Luce. I live near here - at Buckshaw." I jerked my thumb in the general direction. She was still staring at me like a woman in the grip of a nightmare. "I'm sorry," I said. "I didn't mean to startle you." She pulled herself up to her full height - which couldn't have been much more than five feet and an inch or two - and took a step towards me, like a hot-tempered version of the Botticelli Venus that I'd once seen on a Huntley and Palmer's biscuit tin. I stood my ground, staring at her dress. It was a creamy cotton print with a gathered bodice and a flaring skirt, covered al... *Revue de presse* Selected praise for *The Sweetness at the Bottom of the Pie* One of the hottest reads of 2009. The Times (U.K.) Sure in its story, pace and voice, *The Sweetness at the Bottom of the Pie* deliciously mixes all the ingredients of great storytelling. The kind of novel you can pass on to any reader knowing their pleasure is assured. Andrew Pyper, acclaimed author of *The Killing Circle* A wickedly clever story, a dead true and original voice, and an English country house in the summer: Alexander McCall Smith meets Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Please, please, Mr. Bradley, tell me we will be seeing Flavia again soon? Laurie R. King, bestselling author of *The Game* Alan Bradley brews a bubbly beaker of fun in his devilishly clever, wickedly amusing debut mystery, launching an eleven-year-old heroine with a passion for chemistry and revenge! What a delightful, original book! Carolyn Hart, award-winning author of *Death Walked In* Alan Bradley's marvelous book, *The Sweetness at the Bottom of the Pie*, is a fantastic read, a winner. Flavia walks right off the page and follows me through my day. I can hardly

wait for the next book. Bravo. Louise Penny, acclaimed author of *Still Life* *The Sweetness at the Bottom of the Pie* is an absolute treat. It is original, clever, entertaining and funny. Bradley, whose biography suggests he did not spend a great deal of time in 1950s rural England where his novel is set, has captured a moment in time perfectly. *Material Witness* (e-zine) If ever there were a sleuth who's bold, brilliant, and, yes, adorable, it's Flavia de Luce, the precocious 11-year-old at the center of this scrumptious first novel. Her sisters, Ophelia and Daphne, and the loyal family retainer, Dogger, are among the books' retinue of outstanding characters. *USA Today* Oh how astonishing and pleasing is genuine originality! . . . I simply cannot recall the last time I so enjoyed being in the company of a first-person narrator. This is a book which triumphantly succeeds in its objectives of charming and delighting. And on top of that it is genuinely original. *ing the Evidence* (e-zine) Like just about everybody else I've been reading just finished reading, in fact Alan Bradley's altogether admirable *The Sweetness at the Bottom of the Pie*. It made me very happy, for all kinds of reasons: for its humour, for the wonderful invention of the 11-year-old chemist-detective Flavia de Luce, for its great attention to period detail, and mostly because it was so deft and assured, from top to tail. *CBC Radio* host Bill Richardson, in *The Globe and Mail* From the Hardcover edition.