

Good morning! This is Marylou Burton. You're listening to "Reading Between the Lines," brought to you by the Friends of the Homer Public Library.

We all have our guilty little reading secrets, and mine are mystery series. Rex Stout, Colin Dexter, Arthur Upfield, Tony Hillerman – I've read them all, and many more. What these authors have in common besides being pretty darned good writers is that their books feature strong and interesting main characters, tell an engaging story, and are hugely entertaining. True, the stories slip out of my head as quickly as they slip in, but sometimes that's just what the doctor ordered.

It's always a pleasure, then, to discover a new series to add to the mix. My latest find is Alan Bradley, whose books feature 11-year-old Flavia de Luce. The first in the series, *The Sweetness at the Bottom of the Pie*, came out in 2010 and won an armful of awards, and was followed in short order by three successors. I read the first two back to back and have the third on hold at the library – they are that good!

Flavia lives in 1950 England with her two older sisters – who are not above insinuating that she is not REALLY their sister but rather some unwanted child that their parents took pity on – and her father, a broody man who since his wife Harriet died a decade before seems to find no joy in anything but his stamp collection. Harriet's death in a climbing accident has shaped all of their lives, no less so Flavia who was too young to actually remember her. But as Flavia and her family rattle around in their once-grand estate, she finds clues to her mother everywhere – like Harriet's old bicycle, rusted and the tires flat, which Flavia soon puts in "tiptop order" and renames Gladys. Or better yet, a book entitled *An Elementary Study of Chemistry*, which not only is full of, in Flavia's words, "the sorts of things I needed to know!", but also bears the inscription H. de Luce. Harriet. Her mother.

And so begins Flavia's life as an aspiring chemist. Her father – recognizing her peculiar but persistent interest in chemistry – allows her use of a well-stocked and suitably sinister laboratory that was built early in the century by her Uncle Tar. The lab has German precision microscopes, glass-fronted cabinets filled with chemicals in apothecary jars – even an articulated human skeleton on a wheeled stand! In short, the perfect place for Flavia to hang out, conduct experiments, and pursue her particular passion - *poison*.

So when murder occurs and Flavia discovers a corpse in the cucumber bed – well, as you might imagine, excitement ensues and Flavia is in the thick of it. As she flies around on Gladys, ferreting out clues and applying her quick-witted intelligence, or planning a little diabolical revenge on her sisters, you will happily travel with her. She is simply the most engaging young heroine to come along in some time.

*Sweetness at the Bottom of the Pie*, by Alan Bradley, as well as the two succeeding Flavia de Luce books are available at the Homer Public Library. Library hours are Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday 10 a.m. to 6 p.m, and Tuesday and Thursday 10 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Tune in next Sunday morning at this same time for “Reading Between the Lines,” right here on KBBI 890, Homer!