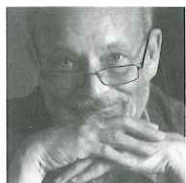


# libraryReads

The top ten books that librarians across the country love

## spotlight | Alan Bradley



Since we first met wickedly smart pre-adolescent Flavia de Luce in Alan Bradley's multi-award-winning *The Sweetness at the Bottom of the Pie*, she's

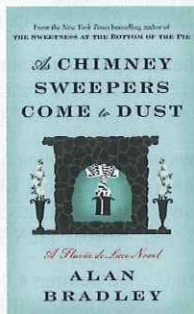
dwelled with her offbeat family in the tumbledown ancestral home, Buckshaw, near Bishop's Lacey, England. But in her seventh outing, *As Chimney Sweepers Come to Dust*, she's leaving town with her brilliant understanding of chemistry—and capacity, as her creator says, to become the world's greatest detective or greatest poisoner. Having inherited Buckshaw and an obligation to the shadowy organization her mother served, Flavia has been banished—*banished!*—to Miss Bodycote's Female Academy in Toronto, where her mother once matriculated.

"It was time for a change of setting," explains Bradley when asked why Flavia has been uprooted. "Her world has been enlarging with each book, and it's inevitable that she would follow in her mother's footsteps." The change of venue allows Bradley to show us that Flavia is growing up, though not in expected ways. "She's learning to accept her differences," asserts Bradley, "that it's all right to be eccentric or antisocial."

The setting also gave Bradley the pleasure of drawing on personal experience. Born in Canada, he was about Flavia's age in the early 1950s, when the series is set, and "it was really a bit of a treat to travel back in time." He attended public school, but because a distinguished Anglican boarding school featured prominently in his hometown, which was near Toronto, he can effectively communicate the otherworldliness of a place like Miss Bodycote's. "So many private schools had a history of a cloistered life, so the building itself comes with past shadows and feelings," he says. "It's the same cloistered

life with the same clash of personalities."

Because Bradley's school included students whose families had emigrated from England after the war, he saw firsthand how Flavia could be so disoriented by the contrasts in language and culture. "They were more refined and polite than we ruffians were," he says of his English classmates, "and Canada is such a vast land of water and trees and lakes." What's more, Flavia's character sets her apart from classmates. "She's a loner," explains Bradley, "and it would be out of character for her to become lovable and cuddly."



Once Flavia arrives at Miss Bodycote's, plot twists come faster than Canadian snowfall, and it won't spoil the fun to reveal that a corpse tumbles from a chimney. "You want to find the body someplace interesting," says Bradley.

Since he's learning his chemistry as he goes, Bradley studies textbooks for the chemical reactions leading Flavia to the murderer. And because her knowledge of chemistry comes from her late great-uncle's lab, dating to 1928, when chemical names were sometimes different and formulas written differently, the textbooks are old. But Bradley's sense of observation is as keen as gung-ho scientist Flavia's, though it works in other ways. Says Bradley, "As a novelist, you observe people very closely, but in the writing you put a certain twist on it."

The results so far are seven sparkling Flavia de Luce mysteries, plus a just-issued e-short story titled "The Curious Case of the Copper Corpse" that stands apart from the series sequence and originated with his Italian publisher, who wanted it for an anthology. What's more, Bradley is Distinguished Speaker at the annual Sherlock Holmes Dinner in New York City this January. Do we detect a certain excitement in his voice when he imparts this knowledge? It's elementary!—Barbara Hoffert

## January 2015 List

- 1 Bradley, Alan. *As Chimney Sweepers Come to Dust*. Delacorte. ISBN 9780345539939. \$25; ebk. ISBN 9780345539953. F  
See Prepub Alert preview: [ow.ly/G0zqZ](http://ow.ly/G0zqZ)
- 2 Simson, Graeme. *The Rosie Effect*. S. & S. ISBN 9781476767314. \$25.99; ebk. ISBN 9781476767338. ROMANCE  
See *LJ*'s starred review: [ow.ly/G17r5](http://ow.ly/G17r5)
- 3 Macallister, Greer. *The Magician's Lie*. Sourcebooks Landmark. ISBN 9781402298684. \$23.99; ebk. ISBN 9781402298691. F  
See *LJ*'s review: [ow.ly/G17Ug](http://ow.ly/G17Ug)
- 4 Hawkins, Paula. *The Girl on the Train*. Riverhead. ISBN 9781594633669. \$26.95; ebk. ISBN 9780698185395. F  
See *LJ*'s review: [ow.ly/G18jG](http://ow.ly/G18jG)
- 5 Brown, Pierce. *Golden Son*. Del Rey: Ballantine. (Red Rising). ISBN 9780345539816. \$25; ebk. ISBN 9780345539823. SF  
See *LJ*'s starred review: [ow.ly/G19e5](http://ow.ly/G19e5)
- 6 van Praag, Menna. *The Dress Shop of Dreams*. Ballantine. ISBN 9780804178983. pap. \$15; ebk. ISBN 9780804178990. F  
See *LJ*'s review [ow.ly/G19DJ](http://ow.ly/G19DJ)
- 7 Harrison, Mette Ivie. *The Bishop's Wife*. Soho Crime. ISBN 9781616954765. \$26.95; ebk. ISBN 9781616954789. F  
See *LJ*'s review: [ow.ly/G1a1q](http://ow.ly/G1a1q)
- 8 Parmar, Priya. *Vanessa and Her Sister*. Ballantine. ISBN 9780804176378. \$26; ebk. ISBN 9780804176385. F  
See *LJ*'s review: [ow.ly/G1bld](http://ow.ly/G1bld)
- 9 Allen, Sarah Addison. *First Frost*. St. Martin's. ISBN 9781250019837. \$25.99; ebk. ISBN 9781250019844. F  
See *LJ*'s review: [ow.ly/G1bLU](http://ow.ly/G1bLU)
- 10 Walker, Julie Ann. *Full Throttle*. Sourcebooks Casablanca. (Black Knights Inc.). ISBN 9781402294518. pap. \$7.99; ebk. ISBN 9781402294525. F

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