

Booklist

Advanced Review – Uncorrected Proof

Issue: December 1, 2018

★ **The Golden Tresses of the Dead.**

By Alan Bradley

Jan. 2019. 352p. Delacorte, \$26 (9780345540027)

Prepare for Arthur Dogger and Associates' first official case, in which 12-year-old Flavia de Luce finally becomes a professional sleuth, with the able help of family gardener and all-around problem solver Dogger. The roller-coaster ride that transpires begins with tears at the wedding of Flavia's sister, Ophelia, prompted by a severed finger in the wedding cake, and extends to death by poisoning (Flavia's special area of expertise), even drawing in some sweet lady missionaries from Africa. Ever self-evaluating, Flavia notes her preteen mood swings, which cleverly mirror the puzzling tangles she and Dogger set out to unravel. The 1950s frame is aptly set with a wealth of period details, including the quaint village of Bishop's Lacey, with its vicarage and altar guild, and Flavia's old-fashioned bicycle named Gladys. Despite the novel's patently improbable plot, Flavia's over-the-top use of alliteration ("ghastly goings-on at the graveside") and proudly precocious, sesquipedalian vocabulary ("I delight in deliquescence"), along with the thoroughly endearing cast of characters, make this series' tenth installment a laugh-out-loud winner. Fans of the brainy Flavia, who "dotes on death," will also enjoy the precocious child narrators and mysterious, twisty plots that abound in Annie Hartnett's *Rabbit Cake* (2017) and Maria Semple's *Where'd You Go, Bernadette* (2012).

— Jen Baker