

Booklist

Advanced Review – Uncorrected Proof

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★ **The Sweetness at the Bottom of the Pie.**

Bradley, Alan (Author)

May 2009. 384 p. Delacorte, hardcover, \$23.00. (9780385342308).

Canadian Alan Bradley's first full-length crime novel is delightful. Like fellow Canadian Louise Penny, his book is the recipient of the Debut Dagger Award from Canada's Crimewriter's Association. *Sweetness* introduces a charming and engaging sleuth who is only 11 years old. Flavia is one of three precocious and extremely literate daughters being raised by English widower, Colonel de Luce, in 1950. Flavia's passion is chemistry (with a special interest in poisons). She is able to pursue her passion in the fully equipped Victorian laboratory in Buckshaw, the English mansion where the de Luce family lives. The story begins with a dead snipe (with a rare stamp embedded on its beak) found on the back doorstep. This is followed by a dead human body in the garden and a poisonous custard pie. Revelations about the mysterious past of Colonel de Luce complicate matters. Others supporting players include the housekeeper Mrs. Mullet and the gardener Dogger, who suffers from shell-shock. When Colonel de Luce is arrested for murder, it's up to Flavia to solve the mystery. The 11 year old claims she is not afraid because "this was by far the most interesting thing that had ever happened to me in my entire life." Only those who dislike precocious young heroines with extraordinary vocabulary and audacious courage can fail to like this amazingly entertaining book. Expect more from the talented Bradley.

— *Judy Coon*