



Die Laughing

Carola Dunn

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One morning in April 1924, The Honourable Daisy Dalrymple Fletcher finds herself in a most unenviable position. Despite her best attempts to elude the inevitable, she must face her darkest fears and with all strength and courage she can muster, must confront the one person she has tried hardest to avoid - the dentist. But upon arriving for her appointment, she finds the waiting room deserted and adjoining examination room locked with no hint of either Dr. Talmadge or his nurse. Thinking to leave quietly, Daisy's retreat is halted by the return of the nurse and, with the help of Mrs. Talmadge, the two begin searching for the inexplicably absent doctor. Exhausting all other possibilities, they resort to looking once again in the surgery where they find him stilling in his dentist's chair with the nitrous mask strapped to his face, the tank of nitrous turned on full, a smile on his face and stone, cold dead.

While the circumstances of his death are out of the ordinary, there's no reason to suspect that it was anything other than a tragic, if inevitable, accident of a careless dope fiend. At least to everyone but Daisy herself. Sure that there is something more than happenstance and an accident involved in the dentist's untimely death, Daisy is determined to uncover the truth behind a case of what she is certain is murder most foul.

Die Laughing Details

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From Reader Review Die Laughing for online ebook

Sylvia Abrams says

A clever light hearted mystery featuring Daisy Dalrymple and her husband, chief inspector Fletcher. Despite the tangle of murder and suicide, I guessed the culprit early in the novel. All the exact descriptions of 1920's St. John's Wood and the glorious clothes could not bring the plot up to the level of other English detective stories.

Lori McD says

3+ stars

This Daisy Dalymple is set in the neighborhood of Daisy's home with her husband, Chief Detective Inspector Alec Fletcher, his daughter Belinda (Bel), and her mother-in-law Mrs. Fletcher. We finally get a glimpse of Daisy's domestic life and her new neighborhood. We also get to meet some new characters we've heard a bit about, such as Deva (Bel's Indian friend) and her mother, Sakari.

Daisy has an appointment with the Fletcher family dentist - she has a cavity of some sort, and going to the dentist is not Daisy's favorite thing to do! This is her first trip to see Mr. Talmadge professionally. She's met the Talmadges in the local "society" gatherings; Mr. Talmadge is tall and very handsome; Mrs. Talmadge is well-dressed and carefully made-up. They're quite the pinnacle of the middle-class suburbia.

Except that when Daisy arrives at Mr. Talmadge's office for her 2:00pm appointment, there's no one in the reception area and the door to the surgery is locked. After waiting 10 minutes, Daisy's nerves have her just about to give up when Nurse Henley flies in, out of breath. She says that she's late arriving back from lunch, and she sighs in relief when she finds that Mr. Talmadge isn't around. Except that when the Nurse and Daisy go through the house to another door into the surgery, they encounter Mrs. Talmadge, getting out of a taxi cab, resplendent in a brown suit, brown hat, and brown veil. Mrs. Talmadge obviously doesn't like Nurse Henley, and she insists upon locating her husband herself. Grabbing the surgery key, Mrs. Talmadge proceeds Daisy into the surgery, and quickly gasps, then tries to block Daisy's view. But it's too late - Daisy's already seen the dentist, Mr. Talmadge, in a chair, with the laughing gas mask and an eerie smile on his face. Mrs. Talmadge exclaims that he must have fallen asleep, but as he's not moving, Daisy quickly checks his pulse... and sure enough, the dentist is dead.

Nurse Henley exclaims it must have been an accident - that the dentist just didn't turn on the oxygen necessary with the gas. She turns the oxygen on, but it's still too late. Daisy tells them to call the doctor and the police, to which both the nurse and the wife blanch. Surely it's just an unfortunate accident! But Daisy notices a small rectangular mark by the dentist's mouth that smells like the sticking plasters of the day (could someone have blocked his air through his mouth?), as well as creases on the arms of his suit that could indicate the dentist had been tied to the chair - probably with bandages. Daisy shoos the ladies out, puts on her gloves, locks the surgery, carefully pulls the door shut, and locks it.

A Sergeant Mckinnon is originally called to the scene, and he seems to be competent enough, except that he poo-poohs Daisy's ideas. So Daisy phones Alec. Poor Alec! And once again, Alec's the assigned DCI.

But the sleepy suburban middle-class neighborhood comes to life after the doctor, the police, Scotland Yard, and a coroner show up. And sure enough, there's evidence to support Daisy's theory of murder. Mrs. Talmadge is in hysterics; Nurse Henley is fighting with everyone, mostly Mrs. Talmadge's maid, and Nurse mentions that Mrs. T wasn't such a good wife, not having an affair. Mrs. T's maid says that "what's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander", leaving Daisy to believe that Mr. T was also having an affair. Somehow, Daisy becomes not only peace-maker, but Mrs. T clings to her side; Daisy and Mrs. T have been nodding acquaintances, but now Mrs. T treats her as a bosom friend. What's Daisy to do?

Suddenly Daisy is thrust into the spotlight as a witness, and becomes subject of Mrs. Fletcher's disapproval, the neighborhood gossip's best friend and most-invited to luncheon, tea, and dinner. Due to her "Honorable" status, the neighborhood never quite accepted Daisy as one of their own -- except for the mothers of Bel's two best friends. Daisy tries to carefully walk the line between being part of the investigation, pleasing Alec, making peace at home, and finding out who's been sleeping with whom.

It comes to light that Mrs. T has, indeed, been having an affair - with a Lord Creighton. And Mr. T's latest mistress seems to have been the wife of Major Walker - a slippery woman, who tells lies as easily as she breathes. When Major Walker ends up dead by apparent suicide (head in the gas oven), and Mrs. Walker's fingerprints are found on the gas, a mug containing Ovaltine and a sleeping draught, and the pan where the milk was heated, it seems as if Mrs. Walker is covering her tracks.

But are Daisy and Alec on the right track?

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This fast-paced book was enjoyable, because we get to see Daisy's domestic life. We see the tension between Daisy and Alec's mother in the home; Alec's mother never approved of the marriage between her middle-class son and the lady of noble birth; she certainly doesn't approve of Daisy's writing career, her housekeeping skills, or her penchant for stumbling over bodies and then interfering in the murder investigations.

We see Mrs. Fletcher take an extended vacation with a friend to her sister's home in Brighton. Daisy is depressed, until Alec tells her that his first wife, Joan, and his mother didn't get along well either; in fact, his mother only came for rare visits while Joan and Alec were married. Alec wonders if he can get his mother to move out permanently, giving everyone the space they need. Belinda is delighted with Daisy as her new mother, and Alec likes the way his daughter is carefree again.

We can only hope that Alec succeeds... we don't know when the book ends.

I hope for more scenes of Daisy's domestic life. It's fun to see her go to historic homes for her articles, but it's refreshing to get a glimpse of her "real" life... to see the setting in which she's joined Alec and Belinda. Thank goodness the Fletcher's domestic help is on Daisy's side!

Melissa Johnson says

This book kept me guessing til pretty close to the end as to who the murderer was.

Silke says

Daisy is such a cheerful and lovely character following her "sleuthing" always gets me out of a funk mood. It's a light hearted mystery series which also takes some time focusing on Daisy private life.

Starling says

I've been reading a lot of dark, complex books lately, so this gentle cozy mystery was a perfect contrast to them.

I've never read this author before, and obviously I'm reading in the middle of the series, but I had no problems following Daisy's personal situation (living some time in the 1920s, married to a detective from Scotland Yard, with a sweet step daughter and the mother-in-law from Hell) and certainly no problem fitting her into the world in which she lives. Considering that Daisy's life is a major part of the book, that is a good thing.

The book has most of the things I require, interesting characters, a twisting plot, and since it is a mystery a good puzzle. I'll be looking for more of these.

Emma Rose Ribbons says

This is frankly subpar. The plot is on so small a scale and the suspects in so low a number that I found the story deeply dull at times, more so because I guessed the identity of one of the murderers fairly early. It's happened before, even with more veteran authors such as Christie (I'm thinking about Cards on the Table here) but it's been usually compensated with interesting character backgrounds. None of that here and the dialogue is too redundant to be of real interest - how many times can you have Alec described in exactly the same way and how many times can you have the housekeeper and the nurse quarrel? I wouldn't recommend this one, the only truly engrossing detail was Daisy's musings on her next magazine article about the evolution of domestic service. Her insight was particularly well-developed and very welcome.

Andrea says

This is a solid series of mysteries - Daisy is neither too-competent nor a clutz, and I'm glad that Alec has pretty much accepted that murder will happen in Daisy's wake, and she's good at finding out what's going on.

Josephine says

It was okay, I like listening to the audio

Beverly Goode-Kanawati says

Great story as usual from Carola Dunn

Lots of twists and turns on this one. Love this whole series of books. Will keep reading her works until I am done!

Melanie says

Fun audiobook for the daily commute. Not my favourite of the series though.

Julie says

I'm here for this series. I love Daisy and her cohort.

Rebecca says

1924 London. Daisy Fletcher, nee the Honorable Daisy Dalrymple, has a wretched toothache. Her husband, Detective Chief Inspector Alec Fletcher of New Scotland Yard, pushes her to go see his local dentist, Raymond Talmadge, and Daisy reluctantly makes an appointment. It's an excuse to get out of the house, at least, which she is uneasily sharing with Alec's mother, who does not approve of Daisy and makes that well known at every possible juncture. However, when Daisy arrives at the Talmadge house, where the dentist has his surgery, no one is awaiting her. When the nurse finally arrives late from her lunch break, then Mrs. Talmadge comes home, they search for the dentist, and find him dead—with the laughing gas mask over his face. Although others assume accident or suicide, Daisy sees evidence that makes her suspect murder—so she calls in the police. There are no shortage of suspects, from the straying wife to the mistress to the wife's lover to the mistress' husband, and more. Even with help from Daisy, can Alec get it sorted out before something worse happens? And how is he going to keep the peace at home?

I love this series, which is reliably solid and full of wonderful period detail, even if sometimes the mysteries aren't all that mysterious. Daisy is such a cheerful, fun character, and while I don't like series in which the detective's miserable personal life becomes the focus, I do appreciate that each Daisy book does advance her relationship with Alec and his family both before and after they marry, in a believable way. It's also nice to see the diversity that the author has done her best to add, considering the time period, though McKinnon is a little too stereotypically Scotch! (He's not the diversity, though—that would be Daisy's Indian friend and her family.) Anyway, a fun series.

George says

#12 in the Honorable Daisy Dalrymple (and her husband Scotland Yard Detective chief Inspector Alec

Fletcher), magazine writer and heiress (no inheritance due to British entailed system) mystery series. It is March (?), 1924 and a toothache sends a reluctant Daisy to a neighboring dentist only to discover him dead.

Sidelight: Daisy has a bothersome toothache which sends her to the Fletcher family dentist. At the office, the bothersome tooth ceases to be a bother and no longer a part of the plot.

Rusty says

The Honorable Daisy Darymple Fletcher works with and around her policeman inspector husband, Alec, to solve a murder. This mystery had two deaths and many suspects but it was difficult to arrive at the answer of "who did it." Only one death was a murder. The other individual took his own life but it seemed like it might have been murder and a suspect was almost arrested. It's a most interesting read and my first featuring this heroine.

Karen Potts says

This book included more of Daisy's neighbors & friends in her investigation. The feel was a bit different from previous books & I enjoyed all the characters & of course the final unfolding. Plus, Daisy & Alec's personal life is moving right along.

Nente says

The mystery solution in this one was quite believable, what's unbelievable is how long they take to get to it. It jumped to my attention at once, waving a big red flag actually.
I liked the picture of Daisy&Alec's married home life a bit more than I did their courtship, and altogether this is way better than almost any of the previous installments. Fewer stock phrases, less Alec getting enraged at something Daisy couldn't help, less modern attitude forcibly brought in to make us like and relate to the characters.

I was still wondering why continue reading, but after this one perhaps I've got more of a reason.

Deirdre says

Daisy has a tooth problem and decides to go to a local dentist, only to find that the dentist is dead. She has to cope with the aftermath and the gossip and at the same time deal with her new life as a wife and mother. It's interesting and also having Daisy finding new friends in this community is going to lead to some interesting future things to happen. But seriously she has the worst luck with people she interacts with.

Victoria says

Just a little creepy!

Maggie Hesseling says

After a while without Daisy I'm glad to be back. Still immensely pleasing, even though this isn't the strongest of the storylines. I do however absolutely love her new friends.

Also, I thoroughly enjoyed the sections told from Alec's point of view. I love that he has these moments in the novel.

Olga Godim says

I'll miss Daisy, the protagonist of my favorite cozy mystery series. I didn't read it in chronological order, and I intentionally didn't read the novels of this series back to back, to prolong the pleasure, but every good thing comes to an end. This book is the last of the series I hadn't read before, except for the new one, just released. Now, to get a new Daisy, I'll have to wait for eternity (well, maybe another year, but still...)

As always, Daisy stumbles upon a dead body in the beginning of the book. And not just a body – it's her dentist. The investigation, conducted mostly by Alec, the DCI of Scotland Yard and Daisy's husband, proceeds in a normal way, but now and again, Daisy comes up with a new little factoid or a new insight, and they frequently turn Alec and his crew in a new direction.

I can't comment on the characterization in this book alone. I absorb Daisy as a whole, like a living person. With every encounter – every book in the series – she grows more complex and more human, progressing from a literary mystery heroine to a woman who lives nearby. I love her. For me, she is a friend, insatiably curious, wise, and deeply compassionate, always ready to take those less fortunate under her wing. Her resentment-laced relationship with her mother-in-law makes her even more alive.

The secondary characters are well defined as well, some of them recurring, others entirely new. Together, they form a solid framework for the story – the only story in the entire series where the culprit has got away from justice. But the search for the murderer is a fun ride, fast and baffling. Every chapter, one more red herring is disposed of, and a new suspect appears.

I didn't guess the real villain until close to the end of the novel, and to tell the truth, I'm still not certain. As Alec couldn't make an arrest, there was no confession and no real evidence, just the conjectures and the possible motivation for the crime. But the process of elimination works here as well as it worked for Sherlock Holmes: "Once you eliminate the impossible, whatever remains, no matter how improbable, must be the truth."

The author's subtle humor, present in the whole series, comes to the fore in this book. After all, how many dentists get murdered in mystery fiction? This is the only one I know.

My favorite quote from the book:

As Daisy gave her address, she was trying to decide what to do next. The sergeant obviously wasn't going to listen to her. Should she phone the Yard again, or just give up and let some maniac run loose hither and yon murdering dentists? The notion was undeniably attractive.

She resists the attraction manfully and goes on helping the investigative team in any way she can, even using her "**adhesive loquacity**" (what a phrase!) when needed.

Note: Look at the gorgeous cover of this paperback. I read the hardcover edition with a different cover art,

also good, but this one with a skeleton is just fantastic!
