



All the Flowers Are Dying

Lawrence Block

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"A man in a Virginia prison awaits execution for three hideous murders he swears, in the face of irrefutable evidence, he did not commit. A psychologist who claims to believe the convict spends hours with the man in his death row cell, and ultimately watches in the gallery as the lethal injection is administered. His work completed, the psychologist heads back to New York City to attend to unfinished business."

Meanwhile, Matthew Scudder has just agreed to investigate the ostensibly suspicious online lover of an acquaintance. It seems simple enough. At first. But when people start dying and the victims are increasingly closer to home, it becomes clear that a vicious killer is at work. And the final targets may be Matt and Elaine Scudder.

All the Flowers Are Dying Details

Date : Published February 28th 2006 by HarperTorch (first published February 15th 2005)

ISBN : 9780061030963

Author : Lawrence Block

Format : Mass Market Paperback 354 pages

Genre : Mystery, Fiction, Crime, Thriller

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From Reader Review All the Flowers Are Dying for online ebook

Dan Schwent says

After framing an innocent man for three brutal murders, a killer from Matthew Scudder's past has resurfaced and means to get revenge on Matt and everyone he holds dear. Can Matthew find the killer before the killer finds him?

"Wow!" is the best way I can sum this one up. I've read that Block wrote this one to be the series ender and it easily could be. As usual, Block delivered the goods and had me guessing, even though I knew who the killer was when I opened the book. There was a red herring that I just couldn't ignore even though I was positive he wasn't the killer.

Matt's supporting cast is all there. The long-suffering Joe Durkin retires, Danny Boy Bell reveals he has prostate cancer, and Mick Ballou makes another cameo. Matt's finally carrying a cellphone which I find hilarious for some reason.

The chapters written from the killer's point of view are some cold, chilling stuff, just like in the previous volume. While I had a pretty good idea Scudder wasn't going to die, who knew who the killer would be taking to the grave with him? The whole Preston Applewhite angle showed what a sick bastard the killer was.

Block hit another home run with this one. Not to be missed by Matthew Scudder fans.

Kemper says

This isn't the last Matt Scudder book that Lawrence Block wrote, but since Matt would now be in his 70s and the one after it, *A Drop of the Had Stuff*, is a flashback novel, this is technically the last case that he works. It seems unlikely that there will be a new one that isn't set in the past but Block has seemingly reached the end of Matt's story before and come back to it so nothing would surprise me. While I'm not sure about that, I do know that this marks the last book that I've reread for reviewing on Goodreads. So it definitely feels like the end of an era all over again.

The melancholy nature of Scudder is one thing I've always loved about this series, but I really noticed while rereading how it evolved as Matt grew older. When he was younger and a drunk, Matt had kind of a horrified fascination with violent death that made him ponder the often short and brutal nature of life. Now in his mid-60s, Matt frequently notes the way that the people and places he knew have started fading out of his life. While reflecting about an acquaintance that recently passed away, Matt thinks:

"He died sometime that summer, not too long after the bar closed, but I didn't hear about it until the fall. So that was one funeral I missed, but these days there's always another funeral to go to. They're like buses. If you miss one, there'll be another coming your way in a few minutes."

So Matt still isn't the most cheerful guy in the world, but he's living a generally happy and quiet life with his wife. Although pretty much retired, when he gets two similar but unrelated requests from women he knows to check out men with mysterious habit that they've started dating, Matt decides to help them out.

Unfortunately, doing a couple of routine favors leads Matt to one of the smartest and most brutal killers he's ever faced.

I could nitpick this book and say that it seems almost to be more about the villain than Scudder with long sections spent on first person interludes in the killer's head while Matt seems mostly reactive versus doing much to seek out the guy. In a weird way that works here because with an older Matt and a little ominous foreshadowing, it feels like the younger, quicker man has the advantage. There's one other point that I didn't notice the first time I read it. (view spoiler)

This still end up being one of the most powerful books in the series with a genuinely creepy villain, and while we got another Scudder story from his younger days in the next one, this one kind of feels like Matt's last stand in a lot of ways.

carol. says

A Matt Scudder book that came perilously close to the "DNF" as soon as I discovered Block using a serial killer viewpoint.

Dear Block, why did you do this? It was such a great run--was a serial killer *really* the direction you wanted to take the Scudder series? Why, I remember the good ol' days when Scudder was a life drop-out, hanging out on bar stools and nursing his way through a whiskey and coffee, subsisting on his favors for 'friends.' Now officially retired and respectable, Scudder is still taking the occasional case, but comes equipped with a cell phone, a computer and actually--*gasp*--takes a taxi.

Actually, I'm not bothered by changing technology and Scudder aging. In fact, I feel Block missed the opportunity to be innovative with showing us more about Scudder's experience on the downside of a long life and the contrast between his emotional and economic states from beginning to end. There is a short meditation on the role of TJ in his life and the absence of his own children, but there isn't too much else. The story opens with Joe Durkin's retirement, which could have been an interesting exploration of a duo working both sides of the law, much as Block did with Scudder and Mick. Instead, about a third of this book is from the perspective of a serial killer, an altogether disgusting experience that I feel adds little to the tale except a bitter aftertaste.

Digression. I do not understand why reading about a serial killer's imaginings would be a reading experience people want to have. I believe in art with both capital and lowercase 'a,' and to experience a killer's thoughts as he (view spoiler) leaves me wishing I could Brillo my brain from the imagery. I get absolutely nothing out of the experience, not a single thrill of horror, nor sadness from witnessing a destroyed life, or any type of emotional catharsis. Nor does it meet any definition of entertainment value. The killer is one sick twist and we spend more than enough time in his head to make it believable. If reading Stephanie Plum left a jelly-doughnut sick aftertaste, this was the sour aftertaste of vomit.

I resorted to skimming over the killer's parts, but there was nothing to be gained from finishing except series continuity. Set-up for the ending failed on even the mystery/detective fronts, marked by a series of paranormal "feelings" which came too fast and coincidental for any trace of book redemption.

Characterization hits a low for Block, with everyone but a shop woman essentially bland and fading into the background. TJ is magically transformed to day-trader, and there's something about his portrayal that is becoming uncomfortable. Perhaps it's the "Tonto" sidekick role where both Block and Scudder are content to leave T.J.'s emotional experience a blank slate. Perhaps it's the way he is a boy wonder, a natural success with everything he tries, and is almost always able to provide Scudder with a crucial puzzle piece.

Easily the best parts of the book are the first two chapters. I found myself stopping at a quote on page 7, reminding me of Block's ability to get at emotional truths:

"The last thing I wanted was a partner, but there's something about that sort of offer that makes one want to accept it. You think it's a cure for loneliness. A lot of ill-advised partnerships start that way, and more than a few bad marriages."

I'll check out the end of the series, but only out of sense of duty, and the hope the Block rediscovers the Scudder in his early books.

Cross posted at <http://clsiewert.wordpress.com/2013/0...>

Raven Tiger {Paint me like one of your 19th century gothic heroines!} says

Rating: 3.5

I enjoyed this book. At times I found this book slumping, mostly because I felt myself not caring about the personal backgrounds/narratives of the main characters for some reason. I really don't know why I felt my brain not caring about them.

The serial killer I found fascinating. Such an evil man. There was no redemptive narrative for this character. It was oddly refreshing.

Brandon says

The day I started my journey through the Scudder series in 2011, I've been dreading this moment. I somehow managed to stretch the sixteen novels over the past four years in an attempt to get maximum enjoyment out of the series. It was a great choice, if I don't say so myself. While there are still two books to follow (A Drop of The Hard Stuff / The Night & The Music), this is the final novel in the Scudder chronology.

Luckily, Block chose to go out on a high note. In All The Flowers Are Dying, Matt is hired to do some digging on a man who may not be exactly who he says he is (side note: aren't we all?). At the same time, a man in Virginia is awaiting execution after being given the death penalty for the gruesome murder of several young boys. While killing time in the clink, the prisoner is interviewed by a psychologist who may not have the best of intentions.

The narrative is broken up between Scudder and this shadowy psychologist for the length of the novel.

Eventually, the two alternating stories merge putting both men on a collision course. Many of Scudder's associates make appearances with Elaine, TJ, Danny Boy Bell and others lingering about alongside the grizzled gumshoe. As always, I find myself craving more Mick Ballou and fans of the Irish mobster will find his contributions to the book lacking.

I'm sad to see Scudder go but Block gives us a fitting ending to the series. I had asked Block in an interview last year if he had truly put the final nail in the Scudder saga and while he noted he had no immediate plans for future books, he has thought he was finished a few times in the past before ultimately returning to tell more stories. Here's hoping he may have another prequel in the tank.

Also posted @ Every Read Thing.

Lynn says

It's really amazing how consistently good these books are. This one was so compelling I was talking aloud to the book....several times I wailed 'oh no!' I may be a bit too bought in with these characters, but after sixteen nail-biters it shouldn't surprise me.

James Thane says

This, the sixteenth Matthew Scudder novel, opens as a psychologist comes to a Virginia prison to visit a man condemned to death for the brutal murders of three young boys. Although the evidence against him was overwhelming, the prisoner continues to protest his innocence. The psychologist claims to believe in the man's innocence, and he's the only one who does. The two men develop something of a relationship over the course of several visits and, at the end, the condemned man asks his new friend to witness his execution.

Meanwhile, up in New York City, P.I. Matthew Scudder is now in his middle sixties and in semi-retirement. He's given up the license he briefly held and no longer actively solicits business. But he will take the occasional client if one seeks him out. After all, no one in his or her right mind could imagine Matthew Scudder living in Florida, playing golf and lining up for the 4:30 p.m. early bird buffet.

A woman pays Matt \$500.00 for what seems like a fairly simple task. She's dating a new man. She likes him, but he's a bit on the mysterious side. For example, they always go to her place and she's never been to his. She's worried that the guy might be a serial killer or--even worse--married, and she wants Matt to check him out.

Matt takes the case and he and his sidekick, T.J., immediately run into a brick wall. The guy has a fairly common name, and they can't get a whiff of him. They attempt to tail him one night after he leaves the client's apartment, but the guy gives them the slip.

Meanwhile, the psychiatrist from Virginia has evaporated into thin air and bad things begin to happen to unsuspecting people in New York. Matt will ultimately realize that something very bizarre and extremely dangerous is afoot. Even worse, a serial killer from a previous case may have Matt and his wife, Elaine, dead in his sights.

This book continues some unfinished business from the previous Scudder novel, *Hope to Die*, and it's great to see Matthew Scudder back in action. Many familiar characters put in an appearance, and the book has an elegiac feel about it. Matt realizes that he's getting close to the end of the line, and after following him for nearly forty years, readers are bound to feel as unsettled about that as Matt does.

This is a very good read and, when first published, had the feel that it might be the last of the Scudder series. Happily, that turned out not to be the case, but still, even re-reading the book one is torn between the temptation to devour it whole and the desire to stretch it out for as long as possible rather than let it go.

My only objection to the book is that here again, as he did in *Hope to Die*, Block alternates between Scudder's POV and that of the villain. After fourteen books in which the only voice was Scudder's, it's still more than a little jarring to have another one intrude, but still, I enjoyed this book immensely.

Maddy says

PROTAGONIST: Matt Scudder

SETTING: New York City

SERIES: #16 of 18

RATING: 4.25

WHY: Sequel to "Hope to Die". A lot going on in this book. We see events from 2 perspectives. There's Matt Scudder and his typical PI work. And then there's a demented, devious serial killer is hard at work. His scheming brain is mind boggling. After killing someone close to Matt and Elaine, he homes in on them. Truly terrifying. A bit too much time in the mind of the killer (italicized chapters) for my taste but otherwise top notch.

Bill Kerwin says

Coming from a master of the crime novel, this book is a major disappointment. It is also a classic example of the havoc that may be caused by an out of control serial killer. I am speaking here not of life itself, but of the world of the novel: *All the Flowers are Dying* shows what deplorable things may happen when a serial killer character controls his novelist, not the other way 'round.

I'll admit the character is an attractive one; I even enjoyed his appearance in the previous novel *Hope to Die*. His flaw—the temptation to leave clues that are “too cute”—is a useful one, and his brief interior monologues, in which we watch murder change for him from a utilitarian crime to an aesthetic pleasure, is chilling and effective.

But now he's back in another Matt Scudder novel, and this time his monologues continue in chapter after chapter, crowding out Scudder's voice and taking over what the reader—this one at least—likes to think of as Scudder's adventure. And there's something about the way Block's writing lingers over the most violent, sexually sadistic details of the murders that makes me feel that Block himself is controlled by the killer too.

Sure, there is good stuff here. I like the little mystery Scudder solves that does not involve the serial killer, and I like the natural, convincing way that Block continues to let his hero age. But overall I found this book

to be a disappointment. There are thrills and suspense here, undoubtedly, but they are both egregious and meretricious.

Melissa says

My favorite of the series. I love these characters so much. Matt, Elaine, T.J., Joe (the sarcasm Joe used was just perfect. I laughed out loud), they're all just so wonderfully done, so realistic.

Such an amazing series.

I feel like there's problems with the killer though. Definitely a serial killer, a very organized serial killer. I have a problem with the array of victims he has. Usually serial killers have a specific type they stick to but this guy was all over the place, women, men, children. I kind of also wish it has been someone from an early book as opposed to a complete unknown. He was definitely very creepy though.

This book had me on the edge of my seat.

Joe Bailey says

A sequel of "Hope to Die". Block really gets into the head of the psycho on this one. You feel dirty after reading the chapters focusing on the serial murderer and his internal musings. Another great entry in the series. Not for the squeamish!

Ellen says

All the Flowers are dying by Lawrence Block.

I first read this book when it was published and now had the distinct pleasure of listening to it on CD performed by Alan Sklar.

This is a Matthew Scudder mystery. We enter this story as an observer to an execution. This beginning of major atrocities had me on the edge of my seat as few if any books have ever held a reaction such as this. The story teller (L.B.) takes us into the mind of a psychopath...a serial killer. A killer who painstakingly plots each murder and visualizes in minute detail the reaction of his victim(s).

Lawrence block once again surpasses my imagination in mystery. This book cannot be overlooked for all Matthew Scudder fans.

Stephen says

Almost at the end of the Scudder series and don't agree with the comments from some that the series falls off a bit towards the end.

The ones in the middle are the best but the whole series has been excellent and all the more enjoyable for having read them in order as by the end there are frequent references to previous books. This one ended up being one of my favourites and was very hard to put down. Just A Drop of the Hard Stuff and the short story collection The Night and the Music to go now.

Donna says

I confess. About three-fourths of the way through the book, I read the last chapter. I couldn't stand it--had to know. Lawrence Block has been messing with readers' minds for a long time, and he's very, very good at it.

In remarks others have made, it's intriguing to note that those unfamiliar with earlier books in the Matt Scudder series seem tentative in their assessment. They seem to feel they're missing some of the pieces, and perhaps that's true. I probably became acquainted with Matt Scudder shortly after he was "born" in 1976. The characters are so real that I've sometimes confused them with real people I've known. The growth of the main character gives me hope for humanity.

The Matthew Scudder series is not for the feint of heart--but then neither is life. For those inclined to look squarely at some of life's darker dangers and real challenges, I recommend the series--but I'd start a few books back from the most recent (but hopefully not last) installment, *All the Flowers are Dying*.

Jason Koivu says

Block lulls you into a sense of ease. His words read like a meeting of two long-time friends over a cup of coffee. They don't necessarily have a great deal to say to one another, they just enjoy each other's company. And then next thing you know someone's been shot/stabbed/raped and a murder is being solved.

That happens through out *All the Flowers are Dying*. There's an ebb and flow of action from start to finish that sometimes switches between the two like flicking on and off the lights. It's a good pace. Just before you have the chance to get too bored with a slow scene, Block's there at the switch to wake you up.

Some of his writing is quite vivid and gorily graphic. At other times he shows Hitchcockian restraint with a crafty subtlety that reminded me of Patrick O'Brian's work. It's been a long career for Block, who began with dime-store crime novellas. What we have with this sixteenth edition in his Scudder series is a maturation of the often ham-fisted crime noir potboiler of yesteryear into a more earthy, human story. Characters are fleshed out, motives delved into more deeply.

Yes, I've intentionally avoided summarizing the book on any level. Spoilers would abound with any attempt. Just know that there are bad guys, good guys...no...there are bad people, good people, but topping the population are your average-joe gray people. There is crime. There is resolution. There is also a good deal of reality and graspable humanity, as well as repulsive inhumanity. It's a veritable melting pot of all that is now.
