



44 Scotland Street

Alexander McCall Smith

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44 SCOTLAND STREET - Book 1

The residents and neighbors of 44 Scotland Street and the city of Edinburgh come to vivid life in these gently satirical, wonderfully perceptive serial novels, featuring six-year-old Bertie, a remarkably precocious boy—just ask his mother.

Welcome to 44 Scotland Street, home to some of Edinburgh's most colorful characters. There's Pat, a twenty-year-old who has recently moved into a flat with Bruce, an athletic young man with a keen awareness of his own appearance. Their neighbor, Domenica, is an eccentric and insightful widow. In the flat below are Irene and her appealing son Bertie, who is the victim of his mother's desire for him to learn the saxophone and Italian—all at the tender age of five.

Love triangles, a lost painting, intriguing new friends, and an encounter with a famous Scottish crime writer are just a few of the ingredients that add to this delightful and witty portrait of Edinburgh society, which was first published as a serial in *The Scotsman* newspaper.

44 Scotland Street Details

Date : Published June 14th 2005 by Anchor (first published 2005)

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Author : Alexander McCall Smith

Format : Paperback 325 pages

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From Reader Review 44 Scotland Street for online ebook

Everyman says

I was lent this book by a friend who insisted that I read it.

I will be clear up front that this isn't a book I would have chosen on my own, since I primarily read classics and nonfiction. That said, I do see why my friend liked it. I thought it was okay, but no more than that.

It was written as a series of daily excerpts in the newspaper The Scotsman, and this shows. The chapters are very short, seldom as long as three pages. In order to keep the reader interested from day to day, the author felt that he had to pack in the events right on top of each other. As a consequence, there is very little space for character development or for descriptions of any kind. In addition, the action, such as it is, hopscoches from one set of characters to another like a bee sipping momentarily from flower after flower, never spending more than a few moments with any one.

The action takes place entirely in a small area of Edinburgh, Scotland, but we never get enough of a description to have any real sense of the places or environment in which events are taking place. Several of the characters live in a rooming house, but we never get to see the house, the street, or much about the interiors of any of the rooms we visit. It's much like watching a play on a bare stage which has characters dashing in, delivering a few lines, and dashing out again. We don't get those lovely descriptions that Trollope, for example, gives us that bring characters to light and give us the sense that we would know them if we ran into them in the street; I could walk past any one of the characters in this book with no spark of recognition whatsoever. Nor do we get any real sense of what Scotland Street looks like, nor of the interior of the art gallery where two of the characters work, nor of any other venue in the book. For a book that takes place in a real place, one has to go to Google Street View to get any sense of the environment in which the characters move.

There is some humor, but it's a muted humor. It's not the wit of Austen, nor the hilarity of Wodehouse, nor the wry English humor of John Mortimer. It's humor strained through a screen of cheesecloth.

I found that the book worked best as a bedside book. It isn't so engrossing that you don't want to put it down when it's time to turn out the light. You never have to spend more than a few minutes to get to a convenient stopping point, and never have to stop reading in the middle of a chapter or scene. It isn't as soporific as, say, Aquinas or Kant, but it is relaxing, intellectually undemanding, and generally restful.

Overall, then, it's a pleasant enough book. On the Baconian scale of books, it's a book to be tasted, but more as the peanuts on the bar than as part of a meal. For those readers for whom that's enough to expect from a book, it's a fine read. Those who want more from a book are advised to look elsewhere.

Marica says

Com'è profondo il mare

Sono un'ammiratrice della Signora Ramotswe, quindi ho voluto provare questa serie dello stesso McCall Smith, ambientata a Edimburgo. Premetto che McCall Smith conosce bene il Botswana e la Scozia, perchè è nato e vissuto Zimbabwe e ha trascorso molto tempo in Botswana e Scozia.

In realtà non ho trovato la storia semplice e interessante che mi aspettavo, probabilmente per l'ottimo motivo che scrivere qualcosa di interessante sul Botswana per il pubblico europeo può essere relativamente facile, mentre lo stesso non vale per Edimburgo, città nota e a breve portata di aereo. In particolare mi sfugge chi possa essere il lettore di questo libro, che tratta dei turbamenti di una ragazza sui vent'anni, ma sono scritti da un vecchio signore che ha visto molte cose e probabilmente è ferrato proprio in quelle altre cose, più che nei pensieri della ventenne contemporanea. I personaggi vengono disegnati con diligenza e senso dell'umorismo, ma anche con un candore e un piglio didattico che il libro sembra rivolto a un pubblico alieno, per esempio ai pesci delle profondità oceaniche, che non hanno mai incontrato una ventenne che fatica a far corrispondere ragione e ormoni o una madre che ha poco da fare e legge troppa pedagogia d'assalto. Inoltre, un dubbio mi assale a proposito dei miei piacevoli libri sulla signora Ramotswe: non sarà che anche in quel caso sono scritti per pesci di profondità e il pesce sono io?

Donna says

I've just finished this book, and I'm absolutely enchanted with it. The title of the last chapter sums it up: "Gain, Loss, Friendship, Love." What more could one ask?

44 Scotland Street is a gentle book, like murmured conversation about fascinating things. The characters are more real than many people I've met in the flesh. After the last page is read, you feel that they continue on without you, as in life.

Literary fiction is like art, I suppose: you either love it or you don't. I loved it.

Laura says

4.5 stars. I forgot how much I really enjoy this series. Is it as great as the No. 1 Ladies Detective, no, but what is? This is very close. Why do I love it?

1. AMS is a soul author for me. He is someone I trust. I feel I know him. I am safe with him. It doesn't matter what is going on, I know he won't let me down. I could say this about any book he writes, sight unseen.
2. His characters, the likable ones (which are nearly all of them), are wise people. I enjoy hearing their thoughts. They are kind and always know the right thing to do or say. I am often moved by what they do.
3. In this series, there are two psychiatrists, a writer, an artist, an anthropologist, an art dealer, a wine merchant; there are interesting people I often learn something from. It's kind of like someone serving a salad and they sprinkled some cool spices on it first. Makes it better than you expected.
4. AMS lives in Edinburgh and a friend once told me I would love it if I ever went there. I hope I get to see it one day, but just in case I don't, I feel I have been there because Edinburgh almost becomes a character in this series.
5. There are a couple of main characters in here that I am really pulling for. They are under 21, both of them, and they are good souls. And I want good things to happen to/for them. And this is a big part of the reason I keep reading (and now, rereading) these books.

That pretty much sums it up, I think. The audio version is performed by a man (can't recall his name, sorry) who does an ok job. I don't like the way he performs most of the women. And I read mostly by listening, so this is a small issue for me. However, will I stop listening? Nope. Just putting it out there in case it might matter to you.

In short, I love you, Alexander McCall Smith. Especially now, for so many reasons. America loves you. We appreciate your good-natured self and your wisdom and your culture and your decency and social butterflyed-ness. You are a good man. Thank you for writing so many books to keep us busy. Long live AMS!

First read, 2010

I enjoyed this, and will definitely continue with the series. Think of this as a soap opera, without the smut. It follows the lives of several residents of a building in Scotland. Very interesting characters, whom it's been interesting to get to know!

Sariah says

Funny that I read this right after reading Vanity Fair. Vanity Fair is a classic that was written as a newspaper serial. I was just thinking about how nobody writes like that anymore when I opened 44 Scotland Street to read in the introduction that the author was chatting up with Amy Tan (name drop!) about that very thing! So his hometown newspaper said to him, "write a serial", and this was it.

I loved it. I keep waffling between giving it 4 or 5 stars because I loved it so much. I loved these characters. I loved their stories. I loved that the chapters were short (because of how it was published), but they weren't separated. They blended well and the overall story was still there. I don't always feel that way about serials. It wasn't a huge plot where Something Big Happens and the characters have Conflict and Resolution (are you reading that in a snooty voice? Because you should be. That's how I typed it. Snooty.). Rather, this is a wonderful character study. I'm so glad there are more books in the series. I'm committed to these characters and to this writing and I want more.

Jasmine says

3.5 stars... I was reading 44 Scotland Street before, during and after my short stay in Edinburgh. This was an enjoyable read - entertaining without being too superficial and with well-drawn characters. I liked especially the vibrant description of Edinburgh, and I wrote down one or two names of bookshops and restaurants mentioned in the book. I usually tend to rate these stories rather with 3 stars than 4, as they are not very profound. However, I had such a great time in Edinburgh and this review is far from being professional, therefore, I am gladly giving 4 stars!

Phyllis says

I wish I'd known before purchasing this for my kindle that it was originally published as a daily!! newspaper serial. Being prolific obviously comes easily to McCall, and he accepted this challenge with no second thoughts (comparing himself to Dickens!) whose novels were also originally published as serials, but McCall

does a disservice to the reader. Too many characters with too many stories, some of which never become resolved. And most of these characters are one dimensional. I was especially irked by the young woman who thinks her flatmate is a jerk but can't resist his physical beauty. Do any women really think this way? Sounds more like a man to me.

I believed (whether it was true or not) that I could see McCall at night, biting his lip while he thought up another so many words to have it at the newspaper in time.

While not enjoying this aspect of the book, I can't help but be impressed by this writer's vocabulary, fluid style and general knowledge. I wish he'd slow down (surely he's earned enough by now) and write one, long, great novel!!

Bettie? says

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b051rjpk>

ETA Checked my notebooks and I will not be revisiting this with a view to pick it off the one star floor.

Cathleen says

I've heard and read so many positive reviews of Alexander McCall Smith's novels that when I saw this one at the local library I checked it out. I wanted a change of pace and tone after finishing a somber, difficult to read novel.

I wasn't taken immediately by this novel, almost abandoning it, thinking it was a little too cotton-candyish for my taste. I'm glad I kept with it. All the residents of 44 Scotland Street have interesting back stories, and McCall Smith develops each character with an eye toward future installments of the series. Some, like Pat and Matthew, are young, diffident, and endearing; others are oblivious to their own narcissism or self-absorption, but all of them captured my interest and made me curious about how their lives would unfold.

I especially liked how McCall Smith introduces philosophical questions about the nature of being, aesthetics, ethics, and politics lightly into the narrative. Although many of the references to Scottish politics were lost on me, the edition I read had a very helpful glossary of names. Overall, a very enjoyable read, and I'll look for the rest of this series.

Book Concierge says

Audiobook read by Robert Ian Makenzie

Illustrations by Iain McKintosh

3.5***

From the book jacket: 44 Scotland Street [is] home to some of Edinburgh's most colorful characters. There's Pat, a twenty-year-old who has recently moved into a flat with Bruce, an athletic young man with a keen awareness of his own appearance. Their neighbor, Domenica, is an eccentric and insightful widow. In the flat below are Irene and her appealing son Bertie, who is the victim of his mother's desire for him to learn the saxophone and Italian – all at the tender age of five.

My reactions

In the preface, Smith recalls a conversation he had at a party in California with author Amistead Maupin (who wrote the *Tales of the City* series). That ultimately led to an invitation from *The Scotsman* to write a serialized novel for that paper, and *44 Scotland Street* was born.

I love this kind of ensemble piece. The chapters are short and change focus among the residents of the building at 44 Scotland Street. Not much happens, and everything happens: love found, lost and found again, awkward encounters, a hidden masterpiece, a secret tunnel, dinner with the boss (and boss's wife and daughter), rebellion, great neighbors (and bad ones), a precocious child, a new job and therapy sessions. Through it all the reader is treated to the author's witty observations on this microcosm of Edinburgh society.

Robert Ian Mackenzie does an excellent job of narrating the audio version. He has a great facility with voices, and even gives us a plausible twenty-year-old Pat. He really brings these characters to life, and evokes a sense of fun throughout.

I also must comment on the illustrations by Iain McIntosh, which add to the printed version. I enjoyed looking at the fine detail he includes. Whether depicting Big Lou's coffee bar, the Something Special Gallery, or Bertie yelling at his mother in her flotation tank, they were great fun.

Ellery Adams says

There is something about McCall's Smith's writing that brings a smile to my face. Having read all of the No. 1 Ladies Detective Agency books and adored them, I was hoping to find this series appealing as well and I certainly do. Meeting these Scottish characters is like sitting down to share a cup of coffee with a group of friends. Normally, the tangents some of these characters take would feel irrelevant and make me feel rather impatient, but I was willing to ramble anywhere in the city and cover any subject with these folks. I just wanted to spend time with them. I like Pat too. She's a realistic, sympathetic character and I look forward to sharing new experiences with her.

Andrea says

I am so glad I decided to revisit 44 Scotland Street! A delightful slice of life in Edinburgh a city that I have had the pleasure of visiting. These enchanting tales of the residence of this address gives the reader a glimpse into the hearts and minds of these wonderful characters. Alexander McCall Smith is a favorite writer of mine because he understands human nature and the foibles of his fellow man. What a nice little chuckle you will get when you read of some of the events that take place on the pages of this wonderful book. What a pleasant way to pass the time of day!

Jenn says

So charming and delightful: I love the way Smith creates his characters and the types of characters he creates are so fun to read about and they feel so real. I loved the structure and style of the stories, told serially like Charles Dickens. Although there aren't any completed story arcs, I enjoyed the vignettes and especially little Bertie's travails and the relationship between Pat and Domenica. And the feeling of being around Edinburgh was part of my overall enjoyment for sure.

Ernie says

Alexander McCall-Smith was invited to write a serialized story for an Edinburgh new paper. Each day a short chapter would be published. The author wrote the book as he went along, trying to keep a number of issues ahead. This type of story has interesting consequences. Each chapter needs to be a stand-alone story, worthy of publication. It needs to draw the reader to buy the next issue of the paper to keep up. Also... there is no going back to change an element in the story once a chapter has been published.

The style is interesting. The writer was of interest to me for the #1 Women's Detective Agency Series that he has written. The book was given to me from friends from Edinburgh who enjoyed the setting.

The book follows a series of people who live in Edinburgh in modern times on Scotland street. Their lives intersect as a matter of proximity. Each has a series of little adventures, making discoveries about themselves... or not. But the reader is treated to a moral lesson. The characters are charming and interesting.

The book is like Maeve Binchy novels except there is no central problem that is being addressed. Life goes on and little adventures ensue. But I found the lack of a central story disconcerting until I realized... this was it. Then I enjoyed the description of the characters.

The story finished abruptly, in my opinion. No resolutions were offered to a number of problems raised. But that is life, isn't it. Plus... I understand this is the beginning of the series and if I want to see how the other people and issues develop... I need to keep reading.

Catherine says

Originally published as a serialized novel in *The Scotsman*, *44 Scotland Street* is written in third-person omniscient, but shifts focus amongst several tenants in an apartment building at the title address. Overall, the characters were really one-dimensional. Bruce and Irene were particularly painful to read about, as their view of reality was so twisted and neither of them seemed to possess any redeeming qualities. It's as if McCall Smith was studying psychology while writing the series and decided to create textbook examples of several neuroses from his reading.

Pat, who was apparently the protagonist of the novel, was more sympathetic, but horribly naive and I hated how the traumatic events of her "first gap year" were hinted at, but never revealed. I wanted to slap her multiple times because her actions were so pathetic and stupid. Seriously, if I was that dumb at 20, I hope

someone would have shaken some sense in to me. I suppose that is what the two older, more worldly and experienced characters do, albeit in a much gentler way. Those two characters, Domenica and Angus, are among the most likable of the group, but they're a little too perfect. "Big Lou" -- a local coffee shop proprietress -- was another of the more likable characters, who I'd have been willing to read more about.

Most of the minor characters, especially those with money, were fairly awful as well. Maybe I just don't "get" this writing style, but I did not enjoy what is supposed to be a "joyous, charming portrait of city life and human foibles," etc. I read this for my book group and it wasn't awful, but I don't plan to read anything else by McCall Smith if this is representative of his style.

Mark says

Sixty pages into this book, I stopped and looked at the back of it. What was it about again? Did the same thing sixty pages later.

When I finally closed the back cover, I realized that this is a book about nothing. It's Seinfeld in Edinburgh.

McCall Smith did this serial novel for The Scotsman newspaper in Edinburgh. Each chapter is short -- about 9 inches of copy for a daily newspaper run.

And what he's created is this wonderful and funny character study. Like Seinfeld, nothing much happens, but you really, really enjoy the ride. He had so much fun doing this book that he continued the series and did a second volume. I hadn't intended to read the second volume, but, upon finishing this first one, I marched right out and bought Espresso Tales. I **had** to find out what happened to these hilarious characters -- the narcissist surveyor, the hesitant heroine, the incompetent gallery owner, the eccentric portrait painter with the gold-toothed dog, the domineering mother of the five-year-old prodigy. The characters are the strength of this series and I think I might be hooked for a while.

Bill Khaemba says

Surprised at how much I enjoyed this, really surprised... Before you read this review make some tea get cosy because you are about to take a sneak peek into other people's lives

“The young rarely believe that they will not be able to get what they want because there is always an open future.”

I have to admit that I am always a bit curious as to how my next-door neighbours live, how they act behind closed doors, what they eat for dinner, what books are on their bookshelves and just the general curiosity. Well if you have that burning itch to snoop this book is most definitely for you, the way the author captured the lifestyle of a small apartment building and the inhabitants were simply exquisite.

The premise of the book follows Pat a young naïve 20something-year-old girl who moved out of her

parent's house because "Independence" and on her search for a place to stay she comes across space at 44 Scotland Street. Her life takes an interesting turn when she meet

Bruce- *Her Roommate who is a narcissistic womaniser*

Domenica – *A Writer/ Anthropologist who knows all the neighbour's dirty laundry*

Erica – *pushy Stockbridge mother, and her prodigiously talented five-year-old son, who is making good progress with the saxophone and with his Italian.*

Matthew – *Her New Boss who is struggling to keep his Art Gallery Business afloat*

And we follow each individual as they interact with one another as well as face their life struggles individual.

The characters were so lifelike and the dialogue between them felt genuine. The witty banter present in the writing was sharp and had this dry humour that had me bursting out in public. I appreciate a book that could genuinely make me laugh and this one accomplished that goal so effortlessly. It still had its interesting moments of human psychology as some of the character's philosophies shown without being too direct e.g. Disturbing Parental ways, Failed dreams, self-discovery and so much more. A mystery about a certain painting is present but be weary the mystery doesn't drive the book but the individuals do.

"Daughters could survive a powerful mother, but boys found it almost impossible. Such boys were often severely damaged and spent the rest of their lives running away from their mothers, or from anybody who remotely reminded them of their mothers; either that, or they became their mothers, in a desperate, misguided act of psychological self defence ."

I really had one problem with the book the forced attraction between Pat and Bruce was off putting and just too confusing. It made the female character appear very weak and needy which was just another train wreck. Other than that, the book was such a pleasure from alcoholic dogs to Interesting characters and just hilarious scenes would highly recommend it.

About Author

The small fact this book was originally serialised and a chapter was realised each week in an Edinburgh newspaper.

Thanks for Reading :)

So until next time stay Bookish ;)

Petra X says

Alexander McCall Smith writes a certain type of novel. A cosy sandwiches and scones for afternoon tea type

of book. It's a tone that doesn't vary whether it is set in wet and gloomy Scotland or the glorious sun-filled vistas of Botswana. He also has a definite turn of phrase that is quite unique, but sometimes it seems to be done more because he is so delighted in himself and the cosy world he's created than for moving the stories forward or revealing the characters more fully.

I enjoyed the The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency series until it ran out of steam. The same characters without anything new to add to them so they become caricatures of themselves And always in the, same settings with the same very tiny and unimportant plots.

The excellent writing wasn't enough to induce me to read yet another one after about the sixth or seventh. And so I see it with this book. Another situation, another cosy character or three and a very small storyline.... This book was ok, but I'm not going to read the series, I'll stop here.

Ivonne Rovira says

Alexander McCall Smith had already created two incredibly diverse series — one with Mma Precious Ramotswe, the intuitive and clever Botswanan detective who debuted in the novel The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency, and philosopher Isabel Dalhousie of The Sunday Philosophy Club series — when a chance meeting with Armistead Maupin gave us *44 Scotland Street*. Speaking with Maupin, the author of Tales of the City, gave Smith the idea of borrowing the idea of the apartment house in San Francisco and transplanting it to Edinburgh's trendy New Town neighborhood. This being Smith, the result isn't the least derivative.

As Maupin's tale begins with Mary Ann Singleton moving into an apartment at 28 Barbary Lane, *44 Scotland Street* begins when Pat MacGregor, a girl on her *second* gap year, decides to share a flat in the eponymous building. As the chapters of *Tales of the City* were serialized in *The San Francisco Chronicle* in 1976, the 110 chapters of *44 Scotland Street* were serialized in *The Scotsman* in 2004. But there, the similarities end. While Maupin wrote mostly about young people adjusting to hip San Francisco, the flats at 44 Scotland Street contain residents of the breadth of society: uncertain Pat; her flatmate, narcissistic, smug, and unscrupulous Bruce Anderson; the sophisticated semi-retired anthropologist Domenica MacDonald and her custard-colored Mercedes-Benz 560 SEC; and beleaguered Bertie Pollack, his milquetoast father Stuart, and his *extremely* pushy, snobbish mother, Irene, an aficionado of ultra-modern child psychology theories who's intent on turning her son into a saxophone-playing, Italian-speaking prodigy. The novel also delves into the inhabitants' friends, family, and employers. While the chapters are short, Smith, as always, manages to maintain the perfect balancing act in which he tackles Big Ideas and philosophical questions — the “conversations about things worth talking about,” as one character calls it — while remaining amusing and often laugh-out-loud funny.

Be sure to have the next book in the series in hand before you finish *44 Scotland Street*: You'll be eager to tackle Espresso Tales right away to discover what further adventures befall the 44 Scotland Street denizens.

Jessica says

Alexander McCall Smith, after chatting with Armistead Maupin at a party at Amy Tan's house about serialized novels, undertook to write what is essentially an Edinburgh version of *Tales of the City*. *44*

Scotland Street doesn't have Maupin's very sly wit, sense of zeitgeist and ability to define what is iconic in a place and time, but it's certainly a successful, if light, story of the various young and old tenants of an Edinburgh apartment house and the people in their expanding circles, and nimbly told.
