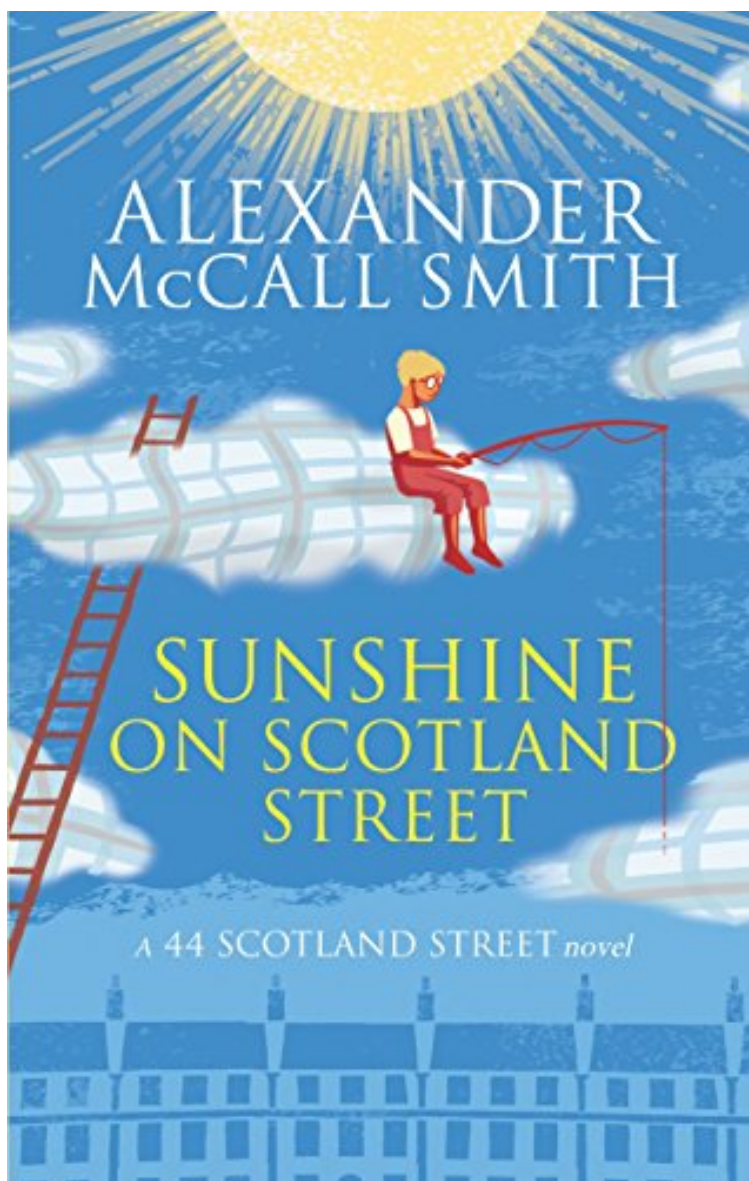


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Sunshine on Scotland Street



*Par Alexander McCall Smith
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[Free] Sunshine on Scotland Street

Par Alexander McCall Smith : Sunshine on Scotland Street before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Sunshine on Scotland Street:

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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurScotland Street witnesses the wedding of the century of Angus Lordie to Domenica Macdonald, but as the newlyweds depart on honeymoon Edinburgh is in disarray. Recovering from the trauma of being best man, Matthew is taken up by a Dane called Bo, while Cyril eludes his dog-sitter and embarks on an odyssey involving fox-holes and the official residence of a cardinal. Narcissist Bruce meets his match in the form of a sinister doppelganger; Bertie, set up by his mother for fresh embarrassment at school, yearns for freedom; and Big Lou goes viral. But the residents of Scotland Street rally, and order - and Cyril - is restored by the combined effects of understanding, kindness, and, most of all, friendship.Extrait1. Omert, and FascinatorsEven if she had not been an anthropologist, Domenica

Macdonald would have understood the very particular significance of weddings. Anthropologists and sociologists too, perhaps even more so often tell us what we already know, or what we expect to hear, or perhaps what we are not surprised to learn. And so we all know, as did Domenica, that weddings are far more than marriage ceremonies; we know that they are occasions for family stock-taking and catharsis; that they furnish opportunities for naked displays of emotion and unscheduled tears; that they are a stage for sartorial and social ostentation; that they are far from the simple public exchange of vows they appear to be. These insights had been impressed upon Domenica decades earlier by a visiting professor, one Salvatore Santaluca of the Istituto-Antropologico-Sociologico-Culturale of the University of Palermo. Santalucas study of the traditional marriage practices of the hill villages of Sicily was something of an anthropological classic, considered by some to be the equal of Margaret Meads Coming of Age in Samoa, exposing the labyrinthine negotiations and discussions that preceded such weddings. Unfortunately, the publication of these details was viewed in some circles in Sicily as a breach of omert, and the professor had some months later been shot in a restaurant in Messina, a crime that had yet to be solved, largely because those who were charged with investigating it were precisely the people who had committed it. Things had changed since then, of course, and the Italian state had tackled the criminal culture that had for so long blighted its southern regions; too late, though, for Santaluca and the various courageous Italian magistrates and policemen who had taken on the secretive bullies holding an entire state to ransom. It rather surprised Domenica that she should suddenly think of poor Professor Santaluca after all these years. But it was quite understandable, really, that she should be contemplating the institution of marriage and its customs, given that she was herself about to get married to Angus Lordie and was now sitting in her flat in Scotland Street, attended by her friend, Big Lou, preparing for the moment only three hours away when she would walk through the door of St. Marys Cathedral in Palmerston Place. Her entry would be to the accompaniment of Sheep May Safely Graze by Johann Sebastian Bach, this piece having been selected by Angus, who had a soft spot for Bach. Domenica had acceded to this provided that it would be her choice of music to be played as they left. That was Charles Marie Widor's Toccata, from his Symphony No. 5, a triumphant piece of music if ever there was one. People will love it, she said. Its such a statement. Of what? Angus had asked. Of the fact that the marriage has definitely taken place, said Domenica. Its not a piece of music that admits of any . . . how should I put it? . . . uncertainty. Maybe, said Angus. Its the opposite of peelie-wersh, I suppose. Domenica was interested. As with many Scots expressions, the meaning of peelie-wersh was obvious, even to those who had never encountered the term before. And which composers would be peelie-wersh? Some of the minimalists. The ones who use two or three notes. The ones you have to strain to hear. Thin music. Widor is thickly textured. They had moved on to discuss the hymns. Domenica felt vaguely uncomfortable when it came to hymns. She understood why people sang them they performed a vital bonding function and undoubtedly buoyed the spirits but she felt that the words rarely bore close examination, mostly being rather sentimental and somewhat repetitive. There were exceptions, of course: the words of For Those in Peril on the Sea were cogent and to the point. It was entirely reasonable, she felt, particularly in an age of global warming and rising sea levels, to express the desire that the mighty ocean deep / Its own appointed limits keep. But could one sing that at a wedding? One might at a mariners nuptials, perhaps, but neither she nor Angus were sailors. And then there was Fight the Good Fight which again had a perfectly clear message, but was clearly inappropriate for a wedding service, unless, of course, it was that of a pugilist, in which case the words would be taken as referring to professional rather than marital conflicts. Jerusalem was inspirational but referred to England, rather than to Scotland, and would seem quite out of place in a Scottish wedding. Jerusalem was inappropriate, too, Domenica felt, because right at its opening it asked a question to which the answer was almost certainly no. Its first line, stirring and dramatic though it may be, And did those feet in ancient times . . . invited the firm answer No, they certainly did not, words which could perhaps be set to music to be sung as a descant by the choir. Angus had not been particularly helpful in his suggestions. He had himself composed the words of a hymn some time ago when he had offered to the hymn revision committee of the Church of Scotland a composition called God Looks Down on Belgium. The opening words of this hymn, however, proved to be not quite what the committee wanted: Gods never heard of Belgium / But loves it just the same / For God is kind and doesnt mind / Hes not impressed with fame. The second verse was even more unsuitable, making reference to Captain Haddock and Tintin, both of whom, it was felt, had no place in a modern, or any, hymn book. You do remember that I wrote a hymn called God Looks Down on Belgium? said Angus. Domenica gave him a warning glance. I do indeed, Angus, and we are certainly not having that. Pity. I always rather liked it. Now, sitting at her dressing table, while Big Lou

attempted to fix on the fascinator she had acquired at great expense from a milliner in Fife One hundred and eighty pounds for four feathers! Big Lou had exclaimed Domenica remembered her first wedding. That had been so different. It had taken place in India, in Kerala, where she had married the eldest son of a Cochin mercantile family and had become for a brief time Mrs. Varghese. That wedding, like many Indian weddings, had lasted for days, with legions of relatives and friends coming from all over India and beyond. It had not been a particularly happy marriage and was very brief, her husband being electrocuted in the small electricity factory owned by his family. She regretted him, but, if she was honest with herself, she did not miss him unduly; nor did she miss her former mother-in-law. Angus came with no family baggage of that sort except for his dog Cyril. Domenica knew that she was taking on Cyril, but felt that given a choice between an impossible mother-in-law or a dog many might choose the latter . . . discreetly, of course.

2. Late Climbers Does it really matter what I wear? asked Domenica. This obsession with the brides outfit is understandable when the bride is twenty-something, but in my case . . . Everybody will be just as interested, said Big Lou, still struggling with the fascinator she was attempting to pin into Domenicas hair. It doesnt matter how old the bride is . . . not that youre all that old, Domenica. She was not quite sure how old Domenica was. Forty-five? A bit more? Or less, perhaps? And Angus was difficult to date too: in some lights he looked as if he was barely into his forties; in others, he looked considerably older. He was one of those people who could have been anything. I suppose age adds character, said Domenica. Or so we can console ourselves. She looked in the mirror. It would have been ridiculous to wear a conventional bridal dress. It would have been mutton dressed up as lamb, she thought a metaphor that would mean less and less as people forgot about the distinction. Where could one buy mutton these days? It seemed more or less to have disappeared; everything, it seemed, was lamb because lambs presumably did not have the chance to reach muttonhood. So the expression would go, and the language would be further impoverished. Tell that not in Gath. That had gone completely by now, as had the habit of piling Pelion upon Ossa. Or making it to the altar. To the what? a contemporary teenager might be expected to ask. Down the aisle. Down the what? Yes, said Big Lou through lips pursed to hold two hairpins. I cant be doing with those smooth faces that you see on film stars. You know the sort? All smooth no lines. Nothing that shows us where the face has been. A few lines, agreed Domenica. But one would hardly like to look too much like a prune. She paused. The fascinator was not going to hold; she was sure of it. Or like W. H. Auden. The loon with the wrinkly face? Yes. His face was described as looking like a wedding cake left out in the rain. Big Lou laughed. It was a good face. Yes. He referred to it as a geological catastrophe. And of course he smoked, which must have made it worse. The kippering effect. She paused again. You know something, Lou? I feel slightly embarrassed about all this. About getting married? Yes. I just dont know . . . Big Lou laid a hand on her shoulder. Haud your wheesht! Its fine getting married at your age, for goodness sake. Youre still a spring chicken compared with some. Spring chicken, thought Domenica: another meat metaphor. So much of our language is still based on the things we used to do like knowing where food came from. It was good of Big Lou, of course, but the fact remained: this was a late wedding. Everythings changed when it comes to age, Big Lou went on reassuringly. Remember how people used to give up early? Remember how our parents generation behaved? They put on carpet slippers when they were in their fifties. They did, you know. I was going to agree, said Domenica. I was thinking of my father. He retired from the Bank of Scotland when he was fifty-six and he stopped driving at the same time. He said he was too old. Whereas today . . . People run marathons at seventy. Domenica nodded, inadvertently loosening the fascinator. Exactly. Keep your head still, muttered Big Lou. Im going to have to do it again. And they climb Everest, or try to, in their seventies. Thats going too far, said Big Lou. But you can certainly take fifteen years off everything these days. She paused. But you cant take height off a mountain. So forty is the new . . . Twenty-five. And fifty is the new thirty-five. Its all a question of attitude. Domenica smiled. So I shouldnt feel embarrassed about getting married at . . . at the age I am? Big Lou finished with the fascinator. No. And that bunnet, if you can call it that that wee bawbees worth of over-priced feathers isnt going to move now. Domenica felt at the delicate construction: it seemed firmly embedded. Thank you, Lou. And thank you for being my bridesmaid. Two auld hens together, said Big Lou. Domenica stood up and allowed Lou to smooth out her dress. She had chosen silver-grey Thai silk that had been made into a strikingly smart suit. Grey T-bar high-heel shoes completed the picture of elegance. She looked at Lou. Do you think Im doing the right thing? Marrying Angus? Of course I do. I wouldnt have agreed to be bridesmaid if I didnt. I suppose not, mused Domenica. Can you imagine a bridesmaid who fundamentally disapproved of the groom? Shed have to stand there and shake her head ominously as the service went ahead. And perhaps the occasional glance at

the congregation to say, Not my doing, any of this. Big Lou smiled. Well, I have no reservations in this case. Except maybe . . . She stopped herself, but it was too late. Domenica looked at her anxiously. Except what, Lou? Lou shook her head. Nothing. Come on, Lou, you cant say except that and then leave it at that. Big Lou looked down at the floor. Well, its just that . . . well, about a year or so ago when Angus was in the coffee bar, he left his briefcase behind. You know that leather thing he carries . . . Well, he left it and I took it behind the counter to look after it for him and an envelope fell out. She stared at Domenica. There was a typed name and address on it and I couldnt help but notice it as I picked it up. Domenica held her breath. Go on. Big Lou lowered her voice. The envelope was addressed to Mrs. A. Lordie. Thats what it said. Mrs. A. Lordie, and it had his address on it. Drummond Place. Domenica stood quite still. She said nothing. So I thought: is Angus already married? Domenica sat down heavily. The fascinator fell off; the feathers came into their own and it floated gently to the floor, where it lay, a small insubstantial thing, a vanity. Drummond Place, where Angus Lordie lived, and where, like Domenica, he was now dressing for his wedding, was at the top of Scotland Street. The flat that Angus occupied also served as his studio, and was on the opposite side of the square from the Scotland Street entrance; not that Drummond Place was really a square parts of it looked as if they belonged to a square, while others were semicircular. It was, he thought, a circle that had run out of architectural room, and had been obliged to draw in its skirts and become a sort of U-topped semi-rectangle; either that, or it had been the work of two architects, one starting at one end in the belief that they were to build a square, and another starting at the other end under the firm impression Drummond Place was to be a circle, or circus. If that is what happened and of course that was just a fantasy then Angus imagined the moment of the meeting of the two sides, a moment of trigonometrical tension, no doubt. Of course buildings can be made to join together without too much difficulty a bit more stone here and there and one has the necessary coming together; how much more difficult it must be for those builders of bridges who start on opposite banks simultaneously. These must meet in the middle, and meet exactly: even a few inches can be a problem, and to miss by yards would be disastrous: no bridge should have a traffic circle or junction in the middle. And as for tunnels: how fortunate it was that the builders of the Channel Tunnel got it right and met, as planned, in the middle. *Revue de presse* A joyous, charming portrait of city life and human foibles (Sunday Express, Praise for the 44 Scotland Street series) --Sunday Express 'Delightful his ear for dialogue and his knack for an unlikely plot make this as much a joy as its predecessors' --Scotland in Trust