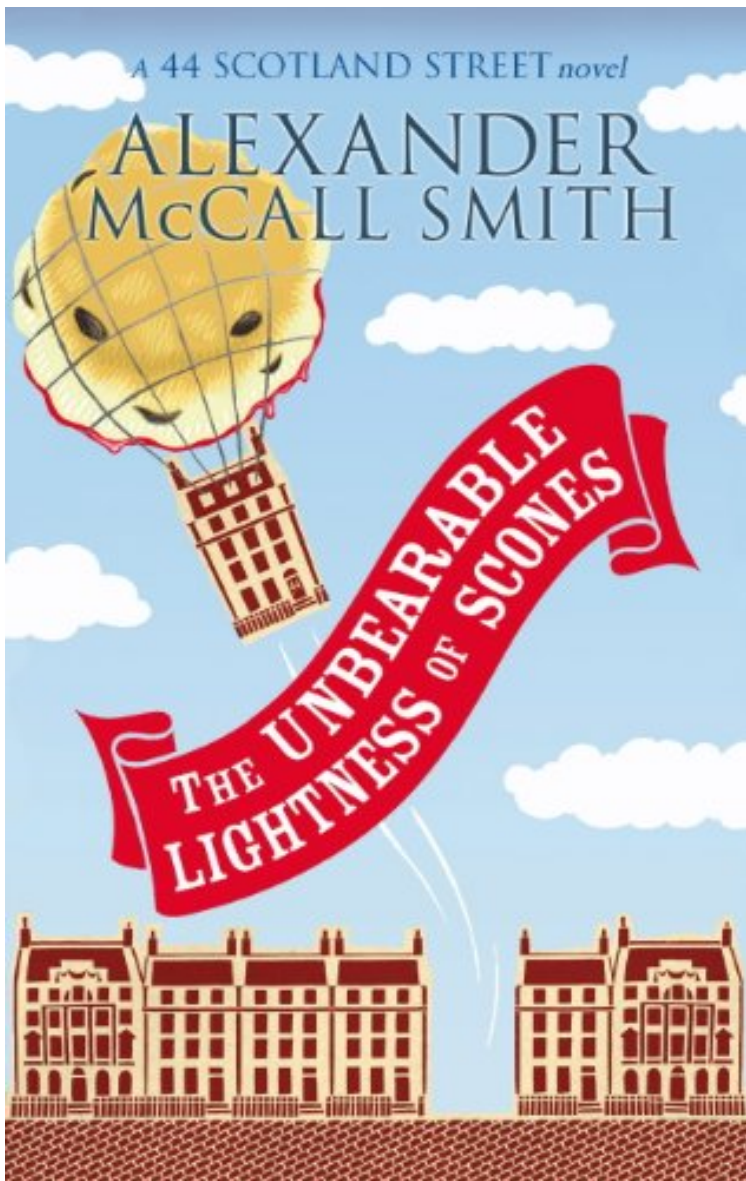


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The Unbearable Lightness Of Scones



Par Alexander McCall Smith
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurTo the casual observer, the great enlightened city of Edinburgh, home of no-nonsense philosophers and cream teas, might appear immune to the rollercoaster of strong emotions. But at 44 Scotland Street, as Matthew and Elspeth embark on the risky enterprise of married love, the raffish portrait painter Angus Lordie has a premonition of disaster. And soon enough Irene Pollock is shocked to learn that her small son Bertie harbours a highly unsuitable ambition; the gloriously vain Bruce discovers a wrinkle and confronts rejection; and Angus finds himself facing the grave consequences of unbridled bliss, not to mention a large Glaswegian gangster bearing gifts . . .co.ukThe phenomenal acclaim for Alexander McCall

Smith's Botswana-set detective series featuring the 'comfortably built' Precious Ramotswe took the publishing world by storm, notably because the gentle, unforced humour of the books was such a contrast with the far grittier fare on offer from most publishers and crime authors. Of course, it's probably true that readers were ready for something a touch more ingratiating --- that's to say, crime books that didn't always end with the walls painted with blood. The latest book in McCall Smith's highly successful career, *The Unbearable Lightness of Scones*, is, however, not one of his Precious Ramotswe books, but an entry in the pleasing (and undemanding) Scotland Street series, full of the good-natured charm and inventiveness that is the author's hallmark. Bertie, McCall Smith's precocious six-year-old protagonist, is still at odds with his domineering mother, Irene, but enjoying his time as a cub scout. Matthew is struggling with the demands of marriage, while Domenica has her own struggle with the loneliness that accompanies her somewhat arid intellectual lifestyle. The residents of 44 Scotland St offer a kind of Celtic alternative to the humour of Armistead Maupin's delightful San Francisco-set *Tales of the City* (although unorthodox sexuality has less of a place here!). It's a something of an achievement in the often dark world of the 21st century to deliver lightweight (but intelligent) entertainment such as this. There will always be those who want more uncompromising fare, but those attuned to Alexander McCall Smith's more gentle world view need not hesitate. --Barry Forshaw

Extrait Love, Marriage and Other Surprises

The wedding took place underneath the Castle, beneath that towering, formidable rock, in a quiet church that was reached from Kings Stables Road. Matthew and Elspeth Harmony had made their way there together, in a marked departure from the normal routine in which the groom arrives first, to be followed by the bride, but only after a carefully timed delay, enough to make the more anxious members of her family look furtively at their watches and wonder. Customs exist to be departed from, declared Matthew. He had pointedly declined to have a stag party with his friends but had nonetheless asked to be included in the hen party that had been organised for Elspeth. Stag parties are dreadful, he pronounced. Everybody has too much to drink and the groom is subjected to all sorts of insults. Left without his trousers by the side of the canal and so on. I've seen it. Not always, said Elspeth. But it's up to you, Matthew. She was pleased that he was revealing himself not to be the type to enjoy a raucous male-only party. But this did not mean that Matthew should be allowed to come to her hen party, which was to consist of a dinner at Howies restaurant in Bruntsfield, a sober do by comparison with the Bacchanalian scenes which some groups of young women seemed to go in for. No, new men might be new men, but they were still men, trapped in that role by simple biology. I'm sorry, Matthew, she said. I don't think that it's a good idea at all. The whole point about a hen party is that it's just for women. If a man were there it would change everything. The conversation would be different, for a start. Matthew wondered what it was that women talked about on such occasions. Different in what way? He did not intend to sound peevish, but he did. Just different, said Elspeth airily. She looked at him with curiosity. You do realise, Matthew, that men and women talk about rather different things? You do realise that, don't you? Matthew thought of the conversations he had with his male friends. I don't know if there's all that much difference, he said. I talk about the same things with my male and female friends. I don't make a distinction. Well, I'm sorry, said Elspeth. But the presence of a man would somehow interrupt the current. It's hard to say why, but it would. So the subject had been left there and Elspeth in due course enjoyed her hen party with seven of her close female friends, while Matthew went off by himself to the Cumberland Bar. There he met Angus Lordie sitting alone with his dog, Cyril. I suppose that this is a sort of stag party for me, Matthew remarked to Angus. Underneath the table, Cyril, who had long wrestled with temptation to bite Matthew's ankles, suddenly leaned forward and licked them instead. There, you see, said Angus. When a dog licks you, it confers a benediction. Cyril understands, you know. That's his way of saying that he's going to be sorry to lose you. But he's not going to lose me, protested Matthew. One doesn't completely disappear when one gets married. Angus looked at Matthew with his slightly rheumy eyes. Really? Well, we won't be seeing much of you here after the event. Well see, said Matthew. He raised his glass of beer to his lips and looked at Angus. Angus was much older than he was and was unmarried, which meant either that there was some profound reason lack of interest or that he had been successful in evading commitment. Now, which of these was it? What about yourself, Angus? Matthew asked. Have you ever thought of . . . tying the knot with anybody? Angus smiled. Nobody would have me, I fear. Nothing would give me greater pleasure, I suspect, but, well, I've never really got myself organised. Of course, you'd need to find somebody capable of taking on Cyril, said Matthew. And that wouldn't be easy. Angus shot Matthew an injured glance and Matthew immediately realised his tactlessness. Cyril is a slight problem, said Angus. It's difficult being canine, you see. Lots of women turn their noses up at dogs. Particularly with Cyril being the sort of dog that he is. You

know, a wandering eye and some unresolved personal freshness issues. But I wish people would see beyond that. Matthew nodded. Angus would be a task enough for any woman, and to add Cyril to the equation made it even more of a burden. What about Domenica? he asked suddenly. I've always thought that you and she might make a good couple. Angus looked wistfully at the ceiling. I've thought that too, he said. But I don't think there's much of a chance there. She can't abide Cyril, you see, and I can hardly get rid of him after all these years. His heart would break. She'd get used to him, said Matthew. And dogs don't last forever. Angus shook his head. No prospect, he said. But let's not talk about me and my problems. What about the wedding? I hear you've got Charlie Robertson to do it for you. I knew him when he was at the Canongate Kirk. He does a nice line in weddings, and Her Majesty used to enjoy his sermons, I gather, when she was in residence at Holyrood. She must have had to listen to an awful lot of wheezy lectures from various archbishops of Canterbury it must have been so refreshing for her to get a good-going, no-nonsense sermon from somebody like Charlie. You know where you stand with the Church of Scotland, although as an Episcopalian, I must say there's a certain folksiness . . . We're making certain changes, said Matthew. We're walking up the aisle together. And we're having a reading from Kahlil Gibran. You know, The Prophet. There's a chapter there about love and commitment. Angus began to let out an involuntary groan, but stopped himself. Sorry, he said. Yes. Kahlil Gibran. I see. And the honeymoon? Matthew leaned forward and whispered. I haven't told Elspeth. It's going to be a surprise. Australia! Angus looked into his glass. For some inexplicable reason, he felt a sense of foreboding, as if a sinister angel had passed overhead and briefly looked down upon them, as one of those lumbering heavy bombers, laden with high explosive, may spot a target below a quiet lane with lovers popular, the innocent going about their business, a farmer driving a truck along a winding lane; irresistible temptations for a sinister angel.