

ALEXANDER McCALL SMITH

LOVE OVER SCOTLAND

A 44 Scotland Street Novel

Illustrations by
IAIN McINTOSH



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This book is for David and Joyce Robinson

44 Scotland Street: The story so far

At the end of the second series of 44 Scotland Street we saw Domenica leaving for the Malacca Straits for the purposes of anthropological research. We saw Bruce safely departed for London. Now Pat is about to start her course in history of art at the University of Edinburgh. She moves out of Scotland Street to the South Side, but this does not mean that she breaks off all connections with the New Town.

Poor Matthew. Even with the recent substantial gift which his father has given him, he is still restless and unfulfilled. Matthew, of course, would like to be fulfilled with Pat, but Pat does not wish to find fulfilment with Matthew.

In the second series, Angus Lordie got nowhere. He is missing Domenica, though, and hopes that the part which she played in his life will be taken by Antonia Collie, a friend whom Domenica has allowed to move into her flat in her absence. However, Antonia proves to be a somewhat difficult character.

We saw Bertie spending more time with his father, Stuart, who had managed to wring some concessions out of Irene, but some dawn, alas, are false. Irene does not change; to change her would be to deprive this story of the strong air of reality which has pervaded it thus far. For this is no fanciful picture of Edinburgh life, this is exactly as it is.

1. *Pat Distracted on a Tedious Art Course*

Pat let her gaze move slowly round the room, over the figures seated at the table in the seminar room. There were ten of them; eleven if one counted Dr Fantouse himself, although he was exactly the sort of person one wouldn't count. Dr Fantouse, reader in the history of art and author of *The Discerning Gaze in the Quattrocento*, was a mild, rather mousy man, who for some reason invariably evoked the pity of students. It was not that they disliked him – he was too kind and courteous for that – they just felt a vague, inexpressible regret that he existed, with his shabby jacket and his dull Paisley ties; no discernment there, one of them had said, with some satisfaction at the wit of the remark. And then there was the name, which sounded so like that marvellous, but under-used, Scots word which Pat's father used to describe the overly flashy – fantoosh. Dr Fantouse was not fantoosh in any respect; but neither was . . . Pat's gaze had gone all the way round the table, over all ten, skipping over Dr Fantouse quickly, as in sympathy, and now returned to the boy sitting opposite her.

He was called Wolf, she had discovered. At the first meeting of the class they had all introduced themselves round the table, at the suggestion of Dr Fantouse himself ('I'm Geoffrey Fantouse, as you may know; I'm the Quattrocento really, but I have a strong interest in aesthetics, which, I hardly need to remind you, is what we shall be discussing in this course'). And then had come a succession of names: Ginny, Karen, Mark, Greg, Alice, and so

on until, at the end, Wolf, looking down at the table in modesty, had said, 'Wolf,' and Pat had seen the barely disguised appreciative glances of Karen and Ginny.

Wolf. It was a very good name for a boy, thought Pat; ideal, in fact. Wolf was a name filled with promise. And this Wolf, sitting opposite her, fitted the name perfectly. He was tall, broad-shouldered, with a shock of golden hair and a broad smile. Boys like that could look – and be – vacuous surfing types with a limited vocabulary and an off-putting empty-headedness. But not this Wolf. There was a lambent intelligence in his face, a light in the eyes that revealed the mind behind the appealing features.

Now, at the second meeting of the seminar group, Pat struggled to follow the debate which Dr Fantouse was trying to encourage. They had been invited to consider the contention of Joseph Beuys that the distinction between what is art in the products of our human activity and what is not art is a pernicious and pointless one. The discussion, which could have been so passionate, had never risen above the bland; there had been long silences, even after the name of Damien Hirst had been raised and Dr Fantouse, in an attempt to provoke controversy, had expressed doubts over the display of half a cow in formaldehyde. 'I am not sure,' he had ventured, 'whether an artist of another period, let us say Donatello, would have considered this art. Butchery, maybe, or even science, but perhaps not art.'

This remark had been greeted with silence. Then the thin-faced girl sitting next to Pat had spoken. 'Can Damien Hirst actually draw?' she asked. 'I mean, if you asked him to draw a house, would he be able to do so? Would it look like a house?'

They stared at her. 'I don't see what that . . .' began a young man.

'That raises an interesting issue of representation,' interrupted Dr Fantouse. 'I'm not sure that the essence of art is its ability to represent. May I suggest, perhaps, that we turn to the ideas of Benedetto Croce and see whether he can throw any light on the subject. As you know, Croce believed in the existence of an aesthetic function built into, so to speak, the human mind. This function . . .'

Pat looked up at the ceiling. At the beginning of the new semester she had been filled with enthusiasm at the thought of what lay ahead. The idea of studying the history of art seemed to her to be immensely exciting – an eagerly anticipated intellectual adventure – but somehow the actual experience had failed so far to live up to her expectations. She had not foreseen these dry sessions with Dr Fantouse and the arid wastes of Croce; the long silences in the seminars; the absence of sparkle.

Of course there had been numerous adjustments in her life. She had left the flat in Scotland Street, she had said goodbye to Bruce, who had gone to London, and she had also seen off her friend and neighbour, Domenica Macdonald, who had embarked on a train from Waverley Station on the first leg of her journey to the Straits of Malacca and her anthropological project. And she had moved, too, to the new flat in Spottiswoode Street, which she now shared with three other students, all female. Those were enough changes in any life, and the starting of the course had merely added to the stress.

‘You’ll feel better soon,’ her father had said when she had phoned him to complain of the blues that seemed to have descended on her. ‘Blues pass.’ And then he had hesitated, and she had known that he had been on the verge of saying: ‘Of course you could come home,’ but had refrained from doing so. For he knew, as well as she did, that she could not go home to the family house in the Grange, to her room, which was there exactly as she had left it, because that would be conceding defeat in the face of life before she had even embarked on it. So nothing more had been said.

And now, while Dr Fantouse said something more about Benedetto Croce – remarks that were met with complete silence by the group – Pat looked across the table to where Wolf was sitting and saw that he was looking at her.

They looked at one another for a few moments, and then Wolf, for his part, slowly raised a finger to his lips, and left it there for a few seconds, looking at her as he did so. Then he mouthed something which she could not make out exactly, of course, but which seemed to her to be this: Hey there, little Red Riding Hood!

2. *A Picture in a Magazine*

At the end of the seminar, when Dr Fantouse had shuffled off in what can only have been disappointment and defeat, back to the Quattrocento, the students snapped shut their notebooks, yawned, scratched their heads, and made their way out of the seminar room and into the corridor. Pat had deliberately avoided looking at Wolf, but she was aware of the fact that he was slow in leaving the seminar room, having dropped something on the floor, and was busy searching for it. There was a noticeboard directly outside the door, and she stopped at this, looking at the untidy collection of posters which had been pinned up by a variety of student clubs and societies. None of these was of real interest to her. She did not wish to take up gliding and had only a passing interest in salsa classes. Nor was she interested in teaching at an American summer camp, for which no experience was necessary, although enthusiasm was helpful. But at least these notices gave her an excuse to wait until Wolf came out, which he did a few moments later.

She stood quite still, peering at the small print on the summer camp poster. There was something about an orientation weekend and insurance, and then a deposit would be necessary unless . . .

‘Not a nice way to spend the summer,’ a voice behind her said. ‘Hundreds of brats. No time off. Real torture.’

She turned round, affecting surprise. ‘Yes,’ she said. ‘I wasn’t really thinking of doing it.’

‘I had a friend who did it once,’ said Wolf. ‘He ran away. He actually physically ran away to New York after two weeks.’ He looked at his watch and then nodded in the direction of the door at the end of the corridor. ‘Are you hungry?’

Pat was not, but said that she was. ‘Ravenous.’

‘We could go up to the Elephant House,’ Wolf said, glancing at his watch. ‘We could have coffee and a sandwich.’

They walked through George Square and across the wide space in front of the McEwan Hall. In one corner, their skateboards at their feet, a group of teenage boys huddled against the wall, caps worn backwards, baggy, low-crotched trousers half-way down their

flanks. Pat had wondered what these youths talked about and had concluded that they talked about nothing, because to talk was uncool. Perhaps Domenica could do field work outside the McEwan Hall – once she had finished with her Malacca Straits pirates – living with the skateboarders, in a little tent in the rhododendrons at the edge of the square, observing the socio-dynamics of the group, the leadership struggles, the badges of status. Would they accept her, she wondered? Or would she be viewed with suspicion, as an unwanted visitor from the adult world, the world of speech?

She found out a little bit more about Wolf as they made their way to the Elephant House. As they crossed the road at Napier's Health Food Shop, Wolf told her that his mother was an enthusiast of vitamins and homeopathic medicine. He had been fed on vitamins as a boy and had been taken to a homeopathic doctor, who gave him small doses of carefully chosen poison. The whole family took Echinacea against colds, regularly, although they still got them.

'It keeps her happy,' he said. 'You know how mothers are. And it's cool by me if my mother's unstressed. You know what I mean?'

Pat thought she did. 'That's cool,' she said.

And then he told her that he came from Aberdeen. His father, he said, was in the oil business. He had a company which supplied valves for off-shore wells. They sold valves all over the world, and his father was often away in places like Houston and Brunei. He collected air miles which he gave to Wolf.

'I can go anywhere I want,' he said. 'I could go to South America, if I wanted. Tomorrow. All on air miles.'

'I haven't got any air miles,' said Pat.

'None at all?'

'No.'

Wolf shrugged. 'No big deal,' he said. 'You don't really need them.'

'Do you think that Dr Fantouse has any air miles?' asked Pat suddenly.

They both laughed. 'Definitely not,' said Wolf. 'Poor guy. Bus miles maybe.'

Inside the Elephant House it was beginning to get busy, and they had to wait to be served. Wolf suggested that Pat should find a table while he ordered the coffee and the sandwiches.

Pat, waiting for Wolf, paged through a glossy magazine which she found in a rack on the wall. It was one of those magazines which everyone affected to despise, but which equally everyone rather enjoyed – page after page of pictures of celebrities, lounging by the side of swimming pools, leaving expensive restaurants, arriving at parties. The locales, and the clothes, were redolent of luxury, even if luxury that was in very poor taste; and the people looked rather like waxworks – propped up, prompted into positions of movement, but made of wax. This was due to the fact that the photographers caked them with make-up, somebody had explained to her. That's why they looked so artificial.

She turned a page, and stopped. There had been a party, somebody's twenty-first, at Gleneagles. Elegant girls in glittering dresses were draped about young men in formal kilt outfits, dinner jackets and florid silk bow-ties. And there was Wolf, standing beside a girl with red hair, a glass of champagne in his hand. Pat stared at the photograph. Surely it could not be him. Nobody she knew was in *Hi!* magazine; this was another world. But it must have been him, because there was the smile, and the hair, and that look in the eyes.

She looked up. Wolf was standing at the table, holding a tray. He laid the tray down on the table, and glanced at the magazine.

'Is this you, Wolf?' Pat asked. 'Look. I can't believe that I know somebody in *Hi!*'

Wolf glanced at the picture and frowned. 'You don't,' he said. 'That's not me.'

Pat looked again at the picture then transferred her gaze up to Wolf. If it was not him, then it was his double.

Wolf took the magazine from her and tossed it to the other end of the table.

'I can't bear those mags,' he said. 'Full of nothing. Airheads.'

He turned to her and smiled, showing his teeth, which were very white, and even, and which for some rather disturbing reason she wanted to touch.

3. Coincidence in Spottiswoode Street

‘Your name,’ said Pat to Wolf, as they sat drinking coffee in the Elephant House. ‘Your name intrigues me. I don’t think I’ve met anybody called Wolf before.’ She paused. Perhaps it was a sore point with him; people could be funny about their names, and perhaps Wolf was embarrassed about his. ‘Of course, there’s nothing wrong with . . .’

Wolf smiled. ‘Don’t worry,’ he said. ‘People are often surprised when I tell them what I’m called. There’s a simple explanation. It’s not the name I was given at the beginning. That’s . . .’

Pat waited for him to finish the sentence, but he had raised his mug of coffee to his mouth and was looking at her over the rim. His eyes, she saw, were bright, as if he was teasing her about something.

‘You don’t have to tell me,’ she said quietly.

He put down his mug. ‘But you do want to know, don’t you?’

Pat shrugged. ‘Only if you want to tell me.’

‘All right,’ said Wolf. ‘I started out as Wilfred.’

Pat felt a sudden urge to laugh, and almost did. There were more embarrassing names than that, of course – Cuthbert, for instance – but she could not see Wolf as Wilfred. There was no panache about Wilfred; none of the slight threat that went with Wolf.

‘I couldn’t stand being called Wilfred,’ Wolf went on. ‘And it was worse when it was shortened to Wilf. So I decided when I was about ten that I would be Wolfred, and my parents went along with that. So I was Wolfred from then on. That’s the name on my student card. At school they called me Wolf. You were Patricia, I suppose?’

‘Yes,’ said Pat. ‘But I can’t remember ever being called that, except by the headmistress at school, who called everybody by their full names. But, look, there’s nothing all that wrong with Wilfred. There’s . . .’

Wolf interrupted her. ‘Let’s not talk about names,’ he said. He glanced at his sandwich. ‘I’m going to have to eat this quickly. I have to go and see somebody.’

Pat felt a sudden stab of disappointment. She wanted to spend longer with him; just sitting there, in his company, made her forget that she had been feeling slightly dispirited. It was about being in the presence of beauty that seemed to charge the surrounding air; and Wolf, she had decided, was beautiful. They had been sitting in that seminar room, she reflected, talking about beauty – which is what she thought aesthetics was all about – and beauty was there before their eyes; assured, content with the space it occupied, as beauty always was.

She picked up her sandwich and bit into it. She could not let him leave her sitting there – that was such an admission of social failure – to be left sitting at a table when somebody goes off. It was the sort of thing that would happen to Dr Fantouse; he was the type who must often be left at the table by others; poor man, with his Quattrocento and his green Paisley ties, left alone at the table while all his colleagues, the Renaissance and Victorian people, pushed back their chairs and got up.

At the door, Wolf said: ‘Which way are you going?’ and Pat replied: ‘Across the Meadows.’

‘That’s cool,’ said Wolf. ‘I’ll walk with you. I’m heading that way too.’

They walked together, chatting comfortably as they did. They talked about the other members of the class, some of whom Wolf knew rather better than Pat did. Wolf was a member of the University Renaissance Singers and had been on a singing tour with one of the other young men. ‘He’s hopeless,’ he said. ‘All he wants to do, you know, is go to bars and get drunk. And he keeps going on and on about some girl called Jean he met in Glasgow. Apparently she’s got the most tremendous voice and is studying opera at the Academy there. He can’t stop talking about her. You watch. He’ll probably bring her name up in the seminar: “Jean says that Benedetto Croce . . .”’

There were other snippets of gossip, and then he enquired about what Pat had been doing the previous year. She told him about the job in the Gallery, which she still had on a part-time basis, and about Scotland Street too.

‘It’s more interesting in the New Town,’ he said. ‘Up in Marchmont everybody’s a student. There are no . . . well, no real people. The New Town’s different. Who did you share with?’

Pat wondered how one might describe Bruce. It was difficult to know where to start. ‘A boy,’ she said. ‘Bruce Anderson. We weren’t . . . you know, there was nothing between us.’ But there had been, she thought, blushing at the memory of her sudden infatuation. Was that nothing?

‘Of course not,’ said Wolf. ‘People you share with are a no-no. If things get difficult, then you have to move out. Or they have to.’

Pat agreed. ‘And I knew everybody else on the stair,’ she said. ‘There was this woman called Domenica Macdonald. She lived opposite. And a couple called Irene and Stuart who had a little boy called Bertie. He played the saxophone and I used to hear “As Time Goes By” drifting up through the walls. And two guys on the first floor.’

They had now crossed Melville Drive and, having walked up the brae past the towering stone edifice of Warrender Park Terrace, with its giddy attic windows breaking out of the steep slate roofs, they were at the beginning of Spottiswoode Street. A few doorways along was Pat’s stair, with its communal door and list of names alongside the bell-pulls. She assumed that Wolf would be going on, perhaps to Thirlestane Road, where so many people seemed to live, but when she indicated that she had reached her destination, he stopped too, and smiled.

‘But so have I,’ he said.

Her heart gave a leap. Was there some other meaning to this? Did he expect her to invite him upstairs? She would, of course. She did not want him to go. She wanted to be with him, to be beguiled.

‘I live here,’ she said, hesitantly.

‘What floor?’

‘Second. Middle flat.’

Wolf swept back the hair that the wind had blown across his brow. ‘But that’s amazing,’ he said, his eyes wide with surprise. ‘So does my girlfriend, Tessie. You must be sharing with her.’