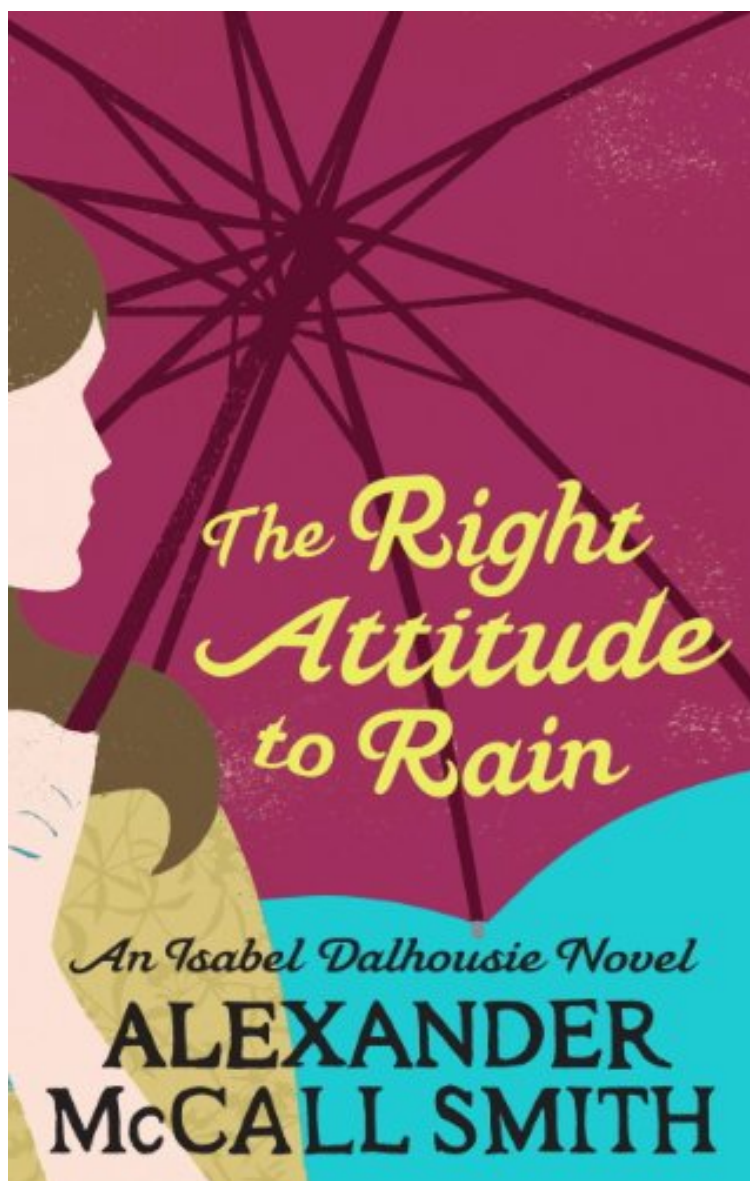


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The Right Attitude To Rain



*Par Alexander McCall Smith
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurThe key to contentment in the Scottish climate is the right attitude to rain - just as in life the key to happiness lies in making the best of what you have.Bruised in love by her faithless Irish husband, Isabel Dalhousie is a connoisseur of intimate moral issues: she edits a philosophical journal and spends a great deal of her time considering how to improve the lives of those around her. There is her housekeeper Grace, whose future she must secure; her niece Cat, who is embarking on a new relationship with a dubious workaholic mummy's boy; and even an American couple newly arrived in Edinburgh on a tour. And then there is Jamie, Cat's ex-boyfriend, a handsome, gifted musician fourteen years Isabel's junior, with whom she is slowly and hopelessly falling in love.Intensely thoughtful and consistently entertaining,

THE RIGHT ATTITUDE TO RAIN is shot through with compassion and unassuming intelligence. CHAPTER ONE To take an interest in the affairs of others is entirely natural; so natural, in fact, that even a cat, lying cat-napping on top of a wall, will watch with half an eye the people walking by below. But between such curiosity, which is permissible, and nosiness, which is not, there lies a dividing line that some people simply missever if it is a line that is painted red and marked by the very clearest of warning signs. Isabel adjusted the position of her chair. She was sitting in the window of the Glass and Thompson caf at the top of Dundas Street where it descended sharply down the hill to Canonmills. From that point in the street, one could see in the distance the hills of Fife beyond: dark-green hills in that light, but at times an attenuated blue, softened by the sea always changing. Isabel liked this caf, where the display windows of the shop it had once been had now been made into sitting areas for customers. Edinburgh was normally too chilly to allow people to sit out while drinking their coffee, except for a few short weeks in the high summer when caf life spilled out onto the pavement, tentatively, as if expecting a rebuff from the elements. This was a compromise to sit in the window, protected by glass, and yet feel part of what was going on outside. She edged her chair forwards in order to see a little more of what was happening on the other side of the road, at a slight angle. Dundas Street was a street of galleries. Some were well established, such as the Scottish Gallery and the Open Eye, others were struggling to make a living on the work of young artists who still believed that great things lay ahead. Most of them would be disappointed, of course, as they discovered that the world did not share their conviction, but they tried nonetheless, and continued to try. One of these smaller galleries was hosting an opening and Isabel could see the crowd milling about within. At the front door stood a small knot of smokers, drawing on cigarettes, bound together in their exclusion. She strained to make out the features of one of them, a tall man wearing a blue jacket, who was talking animatedly to a woman beside him, gesturing to emphasise some private point. He looked vaguely familiar, she decided, but it was difficult to tell from that distance and angle. Suddenly the man in the blue jacket stopped gesturing, reached forward and rested a hand on the woman's shoulder. She moved sideways, as if to shrug him off, but he held on tight. Her hand went up in what seemed to be an attempt to prise off his fingers, but all the time she was smiling Isabel could see that. Strange, she thought; an argument conducted in the language of smiles. But more intriguing still: an expensive car, one of those discreet cars of uncertain make but with unambiguous presence, had drawn up on the caf side of the street, just below the level of Isabel's window. It had stopped and a man and a woman had emerged. They were in a no-parking zone, and Isabel watched as the man pressed the device on his key ring that would lock the doors automatically. You are allowed to drop things off, thought Isabel, but not park. Don't you know that? And then she thought: People who drive cars like that consider themselves above the regulations, the rules that prevent those with humbler cars, and shallower pockets, from parking. And these people, of course, can afford the parking fines; small change for them. She found herself feeling irritated, and her irritation became, after a few moments, animosity. She found herself disliking them, this man and woman standing beside their expensive car, because of their arrogance. She looked down into her coffee cup, and then up again. No, she thought. This is wrong. You should not dislike people you do not know. And she knew nothing about them, other than that they appeared to imagine that their wealth entitled them to ignore the regulations by which the rest of us had to abide. But then they might not know that one could not park there because they were from somewhere else; from a place where a double yellow line might be an invitation to park, for all she knew. And even as she thought this, she realised that of course they were not from Edinburgh. Their clothes were different, and their complexions too. These people had been in the sun somewhere, and their clothes had that cut, that freshly dry-cleaned look that Scottish clothes never seem to have. Scottish clothes are soft, a bit crumpled, lived-in, like Scottish people themselves really. She craned her neck. The two of them, the man considerably older than the woman, were walking down the road, away from the car. They paused as the man pointed at a door, and the woman said something to him. Isabel saw her adjust the printed silk scarf around her neck and glance at the watch on her wrist, a small circle of gold that caught the sun as she moved her arm. The man nodded and they climbed the steps that led into the Scottish Gallery. Isabel sat back in her seat. It was not remarkable in any way; a wealthy couple from somewhere else, driving into town, leaving their car where they should not but out of ignorance rather than arrogance and then going into one of the galleries. There was nothing particularly interesting about all that, except for one thing. Isabel had seen the man's face, which was drawn up on one side from Bell's palsy, producing the conditions characteristic grimace. And the woman's face had been, by contrast, a beautiful one if one's standards of beauty are the regular features of the Renaissance Madonna: soft, composed, feminine. They are none of my business, she

thought. And yet she had nothing to do until twelve o'clock it was then ten-thirty in the morning and she had been half thinking of going into the Scottish Gallery anyway. She knew the staff there, and they usually showed her something interesting by the Scottish artists she liked, a Peplow sketch, a Philipson nude, something by William Crosbie if she was in luck. If she went in now, she would see the couple at closer quarters and reach a more considered view. She had been wrong to dislike them, and she owed it to them now to find out a little bit more about them. So it was not pure curiosity, even if it looked like it; this was really an exercise in rectifying a mistaken judgement. The entrance to the Scottish Gallery was a glass door, behind which a short set of open stairs led to the upper gallery, while a slightly longer set led down into a warren of basement exhibition spaces. These lower spaces were not dark, as basements could be, but brightly lit by strategically placed display lights, and brightened, too, by the splashes of colour on the walls. Isabel went up and passed the desk of her friend Robin McClure to her right. He sat there with his list of prices and his catalogues, ready to answer questions. What impressed her about Robin was that although he could tell who bought paintings and who did not, he was civil to both. So those who wandered into the gallery because it was wet outside, or because they just wanted to look at art, would receive from him as courteous a welcome as those who wandered in with the intention of buying a painting or, in the case of those who were weaker, a readiness to be tempted to buy. That, thought Isabel, was what distinguished Dundas Street galleries from many of the expensive galleries in London and Paris, where bells had to be rung before the door was opened. And even then, once the door had been unlocked, the welcome, if it was a welcome, was grudging and suspicious. Robin was not at his desk. She glanced around her. It was a general exhibition, one where a hotchpotch of works were displayed. The effect, thought Isabel, was pleasing, and her eye was drawn immediately to a large picture dominating one of the walls. Two figures were before a window, a man and a woman. The man was staring out at a rural landscape, the woman looked in towards the room. Her face was composed, but there was a wistful sadness about it. She would like to be elsewhere, thought Isabel; as so many people would. How many of us are happy to be exactly where we are at any moment? Auden said something about that, she remembered, in his mountains poem. He had said that the child unhappy on one side of the Alps might wish himself on the other. Well, he was right; only the completely happy think that they are in the correct place. She glanced about her. There were several people on the main floor of the gallery: a man in a blue overcoat, a scarf around his neck, peering at a small painting near the window; a couple of middle-aged women wearing those green padded jackets that marked them immediately as leading, or at least aspiring to, the country life. They were sisters, Isabel decided, because they had the same prominent brow; sisters living together, thoroughly accustomed to each other, acting almost thinking in unison. But where were the man and the woman she had seen? She took a few steps forwards, away from the top of the stairs, and saw that they were standing in the small inner gallery that led off from the main floor. He was standing in front of a painting, consulting a catalogue; she was by the window staring out. It was the reverse of the large painting that she had spotted when she came in. She was looking out; he was looking in. But then it occurred to Isabel that in other respects the scene before her echoed the painting. This woman wanted to be elsewhere. Isabel? She turned round sharply. Robin McClure stood behind her, looking at her enquiringly. He reached out and put a hand lightly on her arm in a gesture of greeting. Don't tell me, he said. You're standing in awe before our offering. Overwhelmed b...From Publishers Weekly

The third novel featuring well-to-do and somewhat-nosy philosopher Isabel Dalhousie continues McCall Smith's exploration of the rights and wrongs of everyday life, with Isabel's thoughtful presence providing decidedly more intellectual punch than the No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency. When Jamie, a young musician, begins to show interest in Isabel, her stirred feelings threaten to overwhelm her even keel, throwing her into ethical crisis. To what degree are our lives dictated by biological imperatives and desires? Does the meaning of art arise from the art itself or its audience? Are white lies permissible, and if so, when? What does the well-off individual owe the homeless man on the corner? Out-of-town visitors to Edinburgh Americans, no less provide further touchstones for all manner of ethical mulling as well as the grist of the book's mystery: does Angie, a young, inscrutable woman betrothed to a wealthy Dallas bachelor, Tom Bruce, have her eyes set on true love or money? At times Isabel's intense dedication to mindfulness borders on the didactic, but love comes to the rescue, nicely illustrating the book's most important philosophical puzzle: how is it that people find real happiness, and what does it have to do with loving rather than thinking? (Sept. 19)

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