

**A BAD MAN'S
SWEETHEART**

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A Bad Man's Sweetheart by Edmund E. Sheppard

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EDMUND E. SHEPPARD

**A BAD MAN'S
SWEETHEART**



THE YOUNG LADY WHO STOOD WAITING FOR MR. TULLY WAS STRIKINGLY HANDSOME.

A BAD MAN'S SWEETHEART.

. . . Take her hand. Her heart has long been yours.
True love in trouble all the more endures!
She'll cling the closer for the risk she braved
And cherish all the more the life she saved.
There's nought a loving woman will not do,
When once she feels her lover's heart is true.

—Orlana.

BY

EDMUND E. SHEPPARD,

*Author of "Dolly," "Farm Sketches," "Widower Jones," "The Dance at
Deadman's Crossing," etc., etc.*

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A BAD MAN'S SWEETHEART.

CHAPTER I.

THE LATE JOHN KING.

The closed shutters and the long folds of crape pendant from the door-knob intimated to the passer-by that someone was dead at No. 25 Mowburn Street. The someone was John King. In the handsome drawing-room, amid the trappings and millinery of death, as provided by a fashionable undertaker, John King lay in state in the most expensive coffin his weeping widow could procure. John King had left his widow and ten-year-old son with fortune enough to keep them in comfort, but when his eyes closed in death there was no agony in their gray depths except the fear that his wife was unable to take care of herself and her boy. With his last effort he had turned and grasped his little boy's hand and faintly whispered, "Be good to her, Jack." The little fellow sprang from the slender girl who held him, and with his freckled hands clasping his father's face, kissed passionately the stiffening lips. The weeping girl bent over the dying man to remove the child, and heard—"and you, Dell—good to her." His eyes again sought his wife's face, God lifted the cloud of fear and John King died with a happy look on his stern face that death could not chill from the firm lips and sunken jaw, over which swept the long, reddish-blond moustache which in life had scarcely ever wreathed a smile.

Light enough, that late summer afternoon, crept through the shutters to show the rugged but intellectual beauty of the dead man's face, with its smile of peaceful content. Leaning with his elbow on the mantelpiece, an animate man stood gazing calmly at the dead. "The old fellow looks happy, doesn't he?" he said, thinking in half audible communion with himself; "really more so than when he was alive. He evidently prefers being dead to practising law in the day-time and teaching mission-school at night. Never had any leisure or pleasure. Poor old chap, he's having a rest now

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that will last him! Wonder if in the other jurisdiction he'll find a chance to make up for the fun he missed here! Duty! Duty! Duty! Always 'Duty'; no time to sing a song or take a drink, or join the rest of us in some sport! Poor fellow, a sense of duty and lung disease spoiled a brilliant career!" The speaker yawned, as if wearied by the idea, stroked his moustache, straightened himself up and with his hands in his pockets strolled towards the window, stopping for a moment to look more closely at the white face in the coffin.

"Can't be much consolation to the widow to see John looking so happy to get away from her, can it? They seemed happy enough and she's a deuced fine-looking woman too! Don't suppose he ever noticed her looks; too busy hunting for some fad." These thoughts followed him to the window where he turned the slate in the blind and looked out on the quiet street. "'King & Tully, Barristers!' Yes, I must have that changed into 'Stephen Tully, Barrister, Solicitor, etc.!' Big thing for me coming into the whole practice!—if I can hold it." This last thought troubled him for a moment—"I'll have to go slow if I want to keep that church crowd's business; they swore by King,"—after a pause—"if they swore at all, and I suppose everybody swears either aloud or to themselves."

"Who are you?" demanded a sharp voice behind him.

The lawyer turned slowly from the window—Stephen Tully never moved rapidly or without dignity—and surveyed the owner of the voice. "Ah, Master John, I didn't hear you come in. Come over and shake hands with me."

"I won't," Master John responded fiercely. "I don't like you. My papa is dead. Go away, and never come here again."

A boy of ten is never very dangerous except as a tell-tale, but this boy, with freckled, tear-stained face, swollen lips and eyes red with weeping, impressed Mr. Tully as very absurd. The little fellow clenched his hands and advanced threateningly, and this made Mr. Tully laugh.

"How dare you laugh when my papa is dead! You bad man! I struck Jane this morning because she laughed, and I'll strike you," he added, after a choking sob and the comprehension of his own weakness, "with a rock if you laugh when I'll never see my papa again."

Stephen Tully was decidedly a handsome man and of imposing appearance. His voice was pleasant, and his face, expressionless in repose, was bright and captivating when animated. He comprehended the boy, and determined to comfort and win him. "You startled me, my little friend, and the surprise made me smile, but do not think I was laughing at your grief. I, too,

have reason to weep for him—he was my best friend." Mr. Tully's voice sank to a choking whisper, and as he turned towards the coffin he put his handkerchief to his eyes, as if in tears.

"Then what made you laugh?" demanded the boy, with sullen obstinacy of unbelief.

The door opened and a slender figure robed in black entered the room and laid a gentle hand on the irate boy. "Oh, Auntie Dell," he sobbed against the arm which had been thrown about him, "that nasty man laughed at me and said I was a little fool!"

"I beg your pardon, but I did nothing of the kind, Miss Browning. I smiled in surprise at his fierce demand that I should instantly quit the premises, but I did not call him a 'little fool' or speak unkindly to him," Mr. Tully explained with the nearest approach to embarrassment Miss Browning had ever seen him betray.

"He laughed, Auntie Dell," persisted the boy, "and his eyes said—said the nasty words."

"Aha! my little man; you go too fast, and might have made Miss Browning think me rude and unfeeling to the son of my old friend and partner. But you wouldn't have believed it of me, would you, Miss Dell."

"Of course I would have believed it if Jack had said so," she answered softly, while she stroked the boy's soft red-brown hair.

"What makes you let him call you that," demanded Jack, sharply pushing her hand from his head.

"Call me what, Jack?"

"Why 'Miss Dell'! You ain't his Auntie Dell—only mine. You don't like him, do you?" (Interrogatory pause.) "Say, do you, Auntie Dell? I hate him!"

Jack threw out the last idea as a suggestion of the answer he desired her to make, but Auntie Dell refused to concur.

"You should not talk so loud or seem so cross, Jack. What would your poor papa say if he could hear you?" She spoke in gentle reproof, but in an instant she saw her mistake. The boy, reminded of his bereavement, sprang from her side and threw himself upon the pulseless breast of his father, with wild protestations of love. "Nobody loves Jack now! Everybody hates him!" he sobbed hysterically.

Mr. Tully looked displeased, even disgusted. Dell Browning tried to comfort the wailing child, but Jack refused to quit his place beside the dead or cease his outcries. At this moment the door again opened, almost concealing Mr. Tully, who stood behind it.

"Oh, Dell, take him out, or he'll scream himself to death. How could you be so thoughtless as to let him come here, when you knew

how excited he is, and I so low that I can hardly walk!" These words gasped out with querulous intonation, as if the speaker were faint and ill-natured, came from Mrs. King, who in dishabille leaned against the door and made Mr. Tully's position untenable. As he stepped out of the shadow Mrs. King started violently, and exclaiming "I had no idea there were others here!" seized Jack and hurriedly left the room. Jack resisted at first, but an appealing look from his friend made him consent, though at the door he asked, "You'll come and read to me before dinner, won't you, Auntie Dell?"

"Yes, dear, very soon," she answered, and the door closed, leaving her alone with Stephen Tully and the dead. For a moment neither spoke, and then with a quiet smile Mr. Tully invited Dell to be seated by him on the cushioned recess of the window. She looked curiously at him as she sat down, and he answered her by gazing in her face for a moment and saying:

"Your repose and restful face are pleasant after the exhibition we've just had of that demented boy and his dishevelled mother. What a fright the widow looked! One could scarce imagine grief to have such a disastrous effect on beauty. But, perhaps it was because she hadn't her hair combed and had forgotten to put on part of her dress!" He spoke banteringly, and Dell watched his face with the same curious look with which she almost always regarded him.

"You forget, Mr. Tully, that both grief and neglect of dress are excusable in Mrs. King under the circumstances."

"No, I don't, Miss Reproof, and when Mrs. King discovered my presence she didn't forget her lack of comeliness any more than I did. But you always look well and cool. I really believe a tired man could stand on one foot for an hour in the hot sun and rest himself and grow cool and comfortable, simply by gazing on you. I do indeed, though you observe me with that 'wonder-if-I-can-believe-him' look."

"Please don't talk so heedlessly!" exclaimed Dell, drawing further away from him. "You frighten me with your lack of regard for what ordinarily restrains people. How can you joke and carry on over the corpse of a man who was your partner and friend—and more, Stephen Tully—your benefactor?"

"My dear Miss Browning, I am not joking, and I am not 'carry-ing-on,' except in the sense of trying to carry on a conversation, which you desire to be conducted on a funeral basis while I am endeavoring, by ordinary good humor, to prevent both of us from bursting into tears. Just one more word from you and my lachrymal fountains will gush forth and you will have as much trouble