

The Bad Boy

MARGARET KENDALL

Mr. Herbert Watts with his dog Antonio, called commonly Tony, walked into the park, Tony trotting leisurely at the end of his leash. He was a small dog of heterogeneous breed. One grandfather was known to be a full-blooded Irish terrier, but the rest of his grandparents were common dogs. Despite his questionable family tree, Antonio was a remarkable dog, according to the Watts's. Mrs. Watts had just finished a new red sweater for Tony, and the air being chilly on this particular day, he was wearing it for the first time.

Behind Tony walked Mr. Watts duck-fashion, that is—toes out and arches flat against the bottoms of his shoes. He liked the nip in the air, for it made him feel younger and he liked the park, for it had a "healthy" atmosphere. He often saw a friend. He knew many of the children who played in the park, too. Sometimes he gave them nickels. He didn't see any of them today. Once in a while (he never told Alberta this) he made the acquaintance of some beggarly looking fellow, perhaps a transient. One day he had even given one of these fellows five dollars—a very deserving and intelligent fellow, who had had bad luck.

Mr. Watts kept his quick blue eyes alert to see what he could see. He was feeling chipper, almost sentimental. With Tony's leash occupying one hand and a well turned-out cane swinging along in the other, he did not tip his bowler hat to the policeman by the fountain, but he spoke genially. Mr. Watts had always admired uniforms and manly figures.

On days when he felt a trifle bolder than usual, Mr. Watts always wore his favorite bow tie. It was a powder blue with white polka dots. His niece, an art teacher, had sent it to him the

Christmas past, and she had successfully matched his blue eyes. He was wearing the tie today.

Just then Tony ran forward jerking the leash almost out of Mr. Watts' hand and almost pulling Mr. Watts off his balance. He was anxious to run after a squirrel scurrying up the oak tree a few feet ahead of them.

"Tony," admonished Mr. Watts, "that squirrel isn't as big as you are, and you really shouldn't be unfair. Besides, you might have a little consideration for my arm. Come along here."

Tony planted his four feet firmly in the dirt and continued to bark at the squirrel, which had disappeared by this time. Mr. Watts dragged him a foot or so and then he picked up the barking imp and walked down the path, dog in arm.

When the treed squirrel was at a safe distance, Mr. Watts put Tony down, brushed the red woolen particles and white hairs from his dark coat, and walked jauntily on.

There were practically no people in the park comparing that day with a midsummer day. One was there on a bench, one here, but only a few. Only the dark oak leaves were still on the trees, and he wished they would fall, they looked so foolish. Ah, but the air was nice! He wished it would snow, though it wasn't cold enough for that. The park looked pretty, covered with snow.

Tony was behaving well, for the moment. Mr. Watts hoped they didn't meet any other dogs, for the Irish terrier in Tony made him love to scrap. The size of the other dog didn't matter—hound, bulldog, or chow.

At the next division of the path, Mr. Watts stopped and debated which way to go. Finally he turned left. The shrubbery had grown high and thick along the sides of this path,

and it wound first to the right and then to the left again. There the shrubbery ended, and Mr. Watts came to one of the loveliest parts of the park. It was a large open space where the grass grew its greenest—in the summertime. Here and there were clumps of bushes artistically arranged, and several large elm trees completed the scene.

Here were three benches, as Mr. Watts saw it that day. One was to the left of the path, and sitting there was a young man reading a newspaper.

The other two benches were a little to the right of the path and about thirty feet ahead of Mr. Watts, who had stopped at the other end of the shrubbery. These two benches were back to back, and sitting on the far one at one end, their backs to him, were a young man and a young girl who were undoubtedly very much interested in each other. The young man was sitting very close to her, his arm around her shoulders. They were talking quietly.

On seeing the romantic couple ahead of him, Mr. Watts smiled a little. Then he remembered the little book of poetry he had impulsively taken from the bookcase to read in the park. Poetry seemed the very thing to catch his overflowing exuberance today and his delight in the romantic.

In order not to disturb the boy and girl, he pulled Tony quietly back to him and picked him up again. Trying to appear as though he did not see them, he proceeded to the empty bench and sat down at the end nearest him, and the end farthest from the lovers.

Mr. Watts felt a little guilty when the young fellow withdrew his arm from the girl's shoulders, and when their conversation ceased. He was afraid for a moment that they would

move, but paying no apparent attention to them, he put Tony down and slipped the handle of the leash over his wrist. From the inside pocket of his coat he took some heavy rimmed spectacles and set them upon his nose. From the outside pocket of his overcoat he took the small volume.

He thumbed over a few pages, found a selection to his liking, and settled down to read it, "Maud Muller." During the first four lines nothing happened. Though he tried, he could not get interested in the poem. His interest was in the romance at the other end of the bench.

Although to the boy and girl Mr. Watts must have seemed deep in a literary study—if they gave him much thought—he was, in reality, sitting with ears alert to all that might be heard in his vicinity. Mr. Watts fought insincerely against it, but his ear insisted on telling him that the arm was being replaced, and he caught these words:

"Gosh, Dotty"—that was all he could hear. The words were spoken at a very low pitch, and just then Tony began to scratch violently, rattling the license tag on his collar. Mr. Watts could do nothing, but he certainly was provoked.

When Tony at last relaxed, he heard the girl, Dotty, saying, "But Jimmy, you know how Mother would storm if she knew I met you here today. She wouldn't let me out of her sight for weeks if she knew it. I do l."

Here Mr. Watts large cane clattered to the ground, banging against the bench on its way. The placid gentleman in the powder blue tie came near to swearing under his breath. He retrieved the confounded thing and buried himself in the sad tale of the Judge and Maud, but not

for long. In fact, he read three whole verses and didn't read a word. By that time he was again concentrating on the words of the lovers.

"As soon as school is out in June," Jimmy was saying, "I'll have that job that Taylor promised me, and we could get along. If only—."

"How-do-you-do, Mr. Watts," a clear feminine voice shouted at him. "Isn't this a lovely day?—Hello, you cute little dickens, you."

Mr. Watts raised his head quickly. "Oh, how-do-you-do Mrs. Hendrickson. Yes, it is." He rose and tipped his hat with difficulty, considering his encumbrances.

"I missed your wife at the Bright Hour Luncheon today. Is she ill?"

"No, she's well, thank you."

"Tell her she just must come to see me quite soon, will you?"

"Yes, of course." Mrs. Hendrickson's loud voice rang in his ears even as she walked on. He sighed and sat again. It was a moment before his ears became tuned again to hear the low pitch, before he could hear anything more of the private affairs of two youngsters in love. Ah, funny, the things love made a young chap do. He knew!

He turned his eyes as far in their direction as he could without turning his head. He couldn't see anything but the red shoulder of the girl's coat, half hidden by the tan sleeve of the boy's jacket.

"Ah heck, Dotty. Why does your mother have to pick out a lemon like that? I think you even like him yourself."

"Jimmy, how can you say that?—But he is good looking."

"Don't tease me honey. I guess I

could like him if I knew he was in India. Tell me you hate him. You really do, don't you?"

"Let's talk about you, Jimmy. You can be awfully sweet when you want to be."

"What do you mean when I want to be?" His voice was gruffly tender.

Mr. Watts felt a flush rise to his face. He recalled a moment years ago, when he had sat on a stile over a fence dividing two farms. The bewitching, lovely girl beside him had said that very thing to him. "You can be awfully sweet when you want to be." Funny, he couldn't imagine his wife saying anything like that now. He chuckled aloud.

At the sound of his own voice he sat up suddenly—ashamed, guilty. The full weight of his intrusion settled on him. He straightened a grey glove, rose quickly, and—

At the same moment Tony spied a strange terrier on the other side of the path. He made a furious dash for the enemy, pulling his embarrassed and flustered master after him.

Mr. Watts spent his next few moments disentangling Tony and keeping himself from being bitten. Then with a struggling dog wearing a war-torn sweater, a book, and a cane, he made as graceful an exit as was possible. He didn't turn to see if the boy and girl were watching. He didn't scold Tony. He disappeared around the shrubby, bordered path.

"Herbert!" exclaimed Mrs. Watts as she opened the door for him. "Home so soon?"

"Tony," said Mr. Watts solemnly shaking his finger at the ragged dog, "has been a very bad boy."