



## A Proper Scoundrel

**Esther Hatch**

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In Esther Hatch's endearing romance *A Proper Scoundrel*, a railroad owner and a notorious rogue fake a relationship, only to find the seeds of love.

Diana is the successful owner of two railroad lines with plans of opening more. The main obstacle is her unceasing cavalcade of suitors, most of whom hope to claim her wealth after marriage. In a flash of inspiration, Diana realizes that, if she ruins her reputation, no man will want her, leaving her free to conduct business. Diana decides to turn to the legendary rogue Lord Bryant, who's known for leaving a trail of ruined reputations across London.

Bryant is proud of his notoriety. His image has been honed and cultivated, and he wears it like armor. A trauma in his past broke him, leaving him closed off to any possible future romance. Diana proves to be a balm for his soul. Bryant finds himself warming to the headstrong woman who refuses to fall for his charm. The two engage in a relationship that kindles as a friendship, but begins to evolve into something deeper.

The book is populated by engaging characters, including Bryant's elderly butler, who's eager to help his master, and Diana's precocious young nephews, who force her to voice a storybook. Bryant's backstory is difficult, but the couple's fast-firing, witty banter outshines his angst. His legacy as a reputation defiler proves to be grounded in a heartfelt attempt to prevent others from enduring the pain he's suffered. Diana believes she's using him to scare men away, but he's eager to do that for women in similar positions. The chasteness and grounded warmth of their connection injects an emotional tone that is echoed in the book's hopeful closing chapter.

*A Proper Scoundrel* is a clean romance with deep-seated warmth and heart.

JOHN M. MURRAY (May / June 2021)

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